

## Highlights

- Neural trajectories in the hippocampus exhibited greater variability during a working memory (WM) task compared to those in the entorhinal cortex and amygdala regions.
- The distance of neural trajectories between encoding and retrieval states in the hippocampus was memory-load dependent during a WM task.
- Hippocampal neural trajectories fluctuated between the encoding and retrieval states in a task-dependent manner during both baseline and sharp-wave ripple (SWR) periods.
- Hippocampal neural trajectories shifted from encoding to retrieval states during SWR period.

# Hippocampal Neural Fluctuations Between Memory Encoding and Retrieval States During a Working Memory Task in Humans

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## Abstract

Working memory (WM) is crucial for a multitude of cognitive functions, but its underlying neural mechanisms at play remain to be fully understood. Interestingly, the hippocampus and sharp-wave ripples (SWRs)—transient and synchronous oscillation observed in the hippocampus—garner recognition for their significance in memory consolidation and retrieval, albeit their correlation with WM tasks remains to be elucidated. Here we show that during a WM task, multi-unit activity patterns in the hippocampus display distinctive dynamics, especially during SWR periods. This study analyzed intracranial electroencephalography data from the medial temporal lobe (MTL) of nine patients with epilepsy, recorded during an eight-second Sternberg task. Utilizing Gaussian-process factor analysis, we extracted low-dimensional neural representations or trajectories (NT) within MTL regions

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during the Sternberg WM task. The results revealed significant variations in NT of the hippocampus compared to those of the entorhinal cortex and the amygdala. Additionally, the distance of the NT between the encoding and retrieval phases was dependent on memory load. Crucially, hippocampal NT oscillated during the retrieval phase between encoding and retrieval states in a task-dependent manner. Notably, these fluctuations shifted from encoding to retrieval states during SWR episodes. These findings reaffirm the role of the hippocampus in WM tasks and propose a hypothesis: the hippocampus transitions its functional state from encoding to retrieval during SWRs in WM tasks.

*Keywords:* working memory, memory load, hippocampus, sharp-wave ripples, humans

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8 figures, 3 tables, 221 words for abstract, and 3138 words for main text

## 1. Introduction

Working memory (WM) ~~is crucial in everyday life; however, its neural mechanism has yet to be fully elucidated. Specifically, the hippocampus's involvement in WM processing, a pivotal region for memory, is the subject of ongoing research [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8] [9]. Understanding the hippocampus' role in working memory is instrumental in deepening our comprehension of cognitive processes and could potentially enhance cognitive abilities, serving~~ as a key player in cognitive abilities, underpins our daily activities and relations with the world, from basic perceptual decision making to sophisticated cognitive operations. One remarkable component in the neural mechanisms of WM is the hippocampus, an area identified as being crucial for various forms of memory [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9]. Unraveling the role and contributions of the hippocampus within the realm of WM informs our understanding of the cognitive dynamics underpinning everyday functionality. This knowledge may ultimately foster the enhancement of cognitive performance and the

development of interventions for memory-related disorders.

~~Current evidence suggests that a~~ During WM tasks, hippocampal networks yield transient, synchronized ~~oscillation, called~~ oscillations known as sharp-wave ripples (SWRs) [10], ~~is associated with several cognitive functions. These include memory replay [11] [12] [13] [14] [15], memory consolidation [16] [17] [18] [19], memory recall [20] [21] [22], and neural plasticity [23] [24]. These associations suggest that SWR may be a fundamental computational manifestation of hippocampal processing, contributing to working memory performance as well. Recent studies have found that low-dimensional representations in hippocampal neurons can explain WM task performances. Specifically, the firing patterns of place cells [25] [26] [27] [28] [29], found in the hippocampus, have been identified within dynamic, nonlinear three-dimensional hyperbolic spaces in rats [30]. Additionally, grid cells in the entorhinal cortex (EC), which is the main pathway to the hippocampus [31] [32] [33], exhibited a toroidal geometry during exploration in rats [34], which have been found to replay sequences of recent and prospective memory traces [35, 36, 37, 38]. Moreover, functional correlations between awake SWRs and WM performance over multi-day scales have been elucidated by selective SWR suppressions [16, 39, 40], and prolongation events [18], as well as functional lesioning in the dentate gyrus, a subregion of the hippocampus [41]. Certain studies have emphasized the coordination of SWRs with other oscillation components in the facilitation of WM processing [42, 43]. Furthermore, SWR events that occur seconds before memory recall proffer a notion of their essentiality for effective execution of WM tasks [20, 21, 22]. Despite these preliminary insights, our comprehensive understanding of SWRs and their temporal relationship with WM processes remains largely incomplete.~~

~~However, these studies primarily focus on spatial navigation in rodents, which poses limitations. To illustrate, One noteworthy limitation in the current body of research is predicated on the use of rodent navigation tasks, wherein the temporal attributes of the temporal resolution of navigation tasks is inadequate as the timing task were not sufficiently granular to discern~~

~~the exact timings of memory acquisition and recall is not clearly delineated. Consequently, there is a relative paucity of research on the impact of SWRs on WM performance [39]. Further, the presence of noise in signals recorded during rodent movement complicates the detection of SWRs [44]. Therefore, to clarify~~ retrieval, and decision-making processes. Furthermore, the detection of SWRs during predominantly immobile periods in rodents [35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 18], likely due to potential contamination from electromyographic noise [44], limits the extrapolation of experimental findings to subjectively equivalent functionality of WM in humans. It is thus imperative to explore the relationship between SWRs and ~~WM tasks, research with human subjects is necessary~~ human WM in a noise-controlled experimental setup with a temporally precise measurement of WM events.

~~Considering these factors, this study investigates the hypothesis that hippocampal neurons exhibit unique~~ The present study hypothesizes that human hippocampal neurons manifest low-dimensional neural trajectories (NTs) ~~in low-dimensional space that fluctuate with WM load, particularly during SWR periods, in response to WM tasks in humans. To test~~. The emphasis on NTs is derived from the imperative to comprehend the continuous, dynamic representation of neurons and the facilitation of visualization and comprehension. To evaluate this hypothesis, ~~we employed a dataset of patients performing an eight-second Sternberg task (a human WM dataset characterized by high temporal resolution — 1 s for fixation, 2 s for encoding, 3 s for maintenance, and 2 s for retrieval ) with high temporal resolution. Intracranial electroencephalography (iEEG) signals within the medial temporal lobe (MTL) were recorded for these patients [45]. To investigate — [45] was employed.~~

To aptly analyze low-dimensional NTs, ~~we utilized~~ dynamics, dimensionality reduction techniques were implemented. Interestingly, recent findings have shown the presence of dynamic, nonlinear low-dimensional spaces within the firing patterns of hippocampal [30] and entorhinal cortex (EC) neurons in rodents [34]. Accordingly, we applied Gaussian-process factor analysis (GPFA), ~~an established method for analyzing a proven methodology for~~

neural population dynamics [\[46\]](#) analyses [\[46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54\]](#), on intracranial electroencephalography (iEEG) signals recorded from the medial temporal lobe, including the hippocampus, of patients performing a structured WM task.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Dataset

The dataset used in this study, which is publicly available, comprises nine epilepsy patients performing a modified the Sternberg task [45]. This task includes four phases: fixation (1s), encoding (2s), maintenance (3s), and retrieval (2s). During the encoding phase, participants were presented with a set of four, six, or eight alphabet letters. They were then tasked with determining whether a probe letter displayed during the retrieval phase had previously appeared (the correct response for Match IN task) or not (the correct response for Mismatch OUT task). Intracranial electroencephalography (iEEG) signals were captured with a 32 kHz sampling rate within a 0.5–5,000 Hz frequency range, using depth electrodes in the MTL regions: the anterior head of the left and right hippocampus (AHL and AHR), the posterior body of the hippocampus (PHL and PHR), the entorhinal cortex (ECL and ECR), and the amygdala (AL and AR), as depicted in Figure 1A and Table 1. The iEEG signals were subsequently downsampled to 2 kHz. Correlations between variables such as set size and correct rate were examined (Figure ??S1). Multiunit spike timing was determined via a spike sorting algorithm [55] using the Combinato package (<https://github.com/jniediek/combinato>) (Figure 1C).

### 2.2. Calculation of NT using GPFA

NTs, also referred to as 'factors', in the hippocampus, EC, and amygdala were determined using GPFA [46] applied to the multi-unit activity data for each session, performed with the elephant package (<https://elephant.readthedocs.io/en/latest/reference/gpfa.html>). The bin size was set

to 50 ms, without overlaps. Each factor was z-normalized across all sessions, and the Euclidean distance from the origin ( $O$ ) was then computed.

For each NT within a region such as AHL, geometric medians ( $g_F$  for fixation,  $g_E$  for encoding,  $g_M$  for maintenance, and  $g_R$  for retrieval phase) were calculated by determining the median coordinates of the NT during the four phases. An optimal GPFA dimensionality was found to be three using the elbow method obtained by examining the log-likelihood values through a three-fold cross-validation approach (Figure 2B).

### 2.3. Identifying SWR candidates from hippocampal regions

Potential SWR events within the hippocampus were detected using a widely used method [56]. LFP signals from a region of interest (ROI) like AHL, were re-referenced by deducting the averaged signal from locations outside the ROI (for instance, AHR, PHL, PHR, ECL, ECR, AL, and AR). The re-referenced LFP signals were then filtered with a ripple-band filter (80–140 Hz) to determine SWR candidates, marked as  $SWR^+$  candidates. SWR detection was carried out using a published tool ([https://github.com/Eden-Kramer-Lab/ripple\\_detection](https://github.com/Eden-Kramer-Lab/ripple_detection)) [57], with the bandpass range adjusted to 80–140 Hz for humans [21][22][21, 22, 56], unlike the initial original 150–250 Hz range typically applied to rodents [35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 10, 20, 18].

Control events for  $SWR^+$  candidates, labeled as  $SWR^-$  candidates, were detected by randomly shuffling the timestamps of  $SWR^+$  candidates across all trials and subjects. The resulting  $SWR^+/SWR^-$  candidates were then visually inspected.

### 2.4. Defining SWRs from ~~putative hippocampal~~ Putative Hippocampal CA1 regions Regions Using UMAP Clustering

Potential SWRs were differentiated from SWR candidates in putative CA1 (cornu Ammonis 1) regions. ~~These regions were initially defined as follows:  $SWR^+/SWR^-$~~  The definition of putative CA1 regions was as follows.

First,  $\text{SWR}^+$  and  $\text{SWR}^-$  candidates in the hippocampus were projected into a two-dimensional space ~~based on overlapping spike counts per unit~~ using a supervised ~~method, UMAP (clustering method,~~ Uniform Manifold Approximation and Projection (UMAP) [58]. ~~The input features for this projection were the spike counts per unit during the period of  $\text{SWR}^+$  or  $\text{SWR}^-$  candidates.~~ Clustering validation was performed by calculating the silhouette score [59] from clustered ~~samples~~ sample points in the corresponding two-dimensional space. Regions in the hippocampus ~~, which that~~ scored above 0.6 on average across sessions (75<sup>th</sup> percentile) ~~, were identified as putative CA1 regions,~~ ~~resulting.~~ ~~This process resulted~~ in the identification of five electrode positions from five patients.

$\text{SWR}^+/\text{SWR}^-$  candidates in these predetermined CA1 regions were categorized as  $\text{SWR}^+/\text{SWR}^-$ , and thus they no longer retained their candidate status. The duration and ripple band peak amplitude of SWRs were found to follow log-normal distributions. Each time period of SWR was partitioned relative to the time from the SWR center into pre- (at  $-800$  ms to  $-300$  ms from the SWR center), mid- (at  $-250$  to  $+250$  ms), and post-SWR (at  $+300$  to  $+800$  ms) times.

### 2.5. Statistical Evaluation

Both the Brunner–Munzel test and the Kruskal–Wallis test were executed using the SciPy package in Python [60]. Correlational analysis was conducted by determining the rank of the observed correlation coefficient within its associated set-size-shuffled surrogate using a customized Python script. The bootstrap test was implemented with an in-house Python script.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. iEEG Recording and NT in MTL Regions during the Sternberg Task

Our analysis employed a publicly accessible dataset [45], which comprises LFP signals (Figure 1A) from MTL regions (Table 1) recorded during the execution of the modified Sternberg task. We extracted  $\text{SWR}^+$  candidates from



LFP signals that were filtered in the 80–140 Hz ripple band (Figure 1B), originating in all hippocampal regions (refer to Methods section). Meanwhile,  $\text{SWR}^-$  candidates, control events for  $\text{SWR}^+$  candidates, were defined at the same timestamps but distributed across different trials (Figure 1). The dataset encompassed multi-unit spikes (Figure 1C), recognized via a spike sorting algorithm [55]. Employing GPFA [46], we applied this to 50-ms windows of binned multi-unit activity without overlaps to determine the NTs, or factors, of MTL regions by session and region (Figure 1D). We normalized each factor per session and region, for instance, session #2 in AHL of subject #1. We then calculated the Euclidean distance from the origin ( $O$ ) (Figure 1E).

### 3.2. Correlation of Hippocampal NT with the Sternberg Task

Figure 2A exhibits a distribution of median NTs, comprising 50 trials, within the three main factor spaces. Utilizing the elbow method, we established the optimal embedding dimension for the GPFA model as three (Figure 2B). The NT distance from the origin ( $O$ ) — represented as  $\|\mathbf{g}_F\|$ ,  $\|\mathbf{g}_E\|$ ,  $\|\mathbf{g}_M\|$ , and  $\|\mathbf{g}_R\|$  — in the hippocampus surpassed the corresponding distances in the EC and amygdala (Figure 2C & D).<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, we computed the distances between the geometric medians of four phases, namely  $\|\mathbf{g}_F\mathbf{g}_E\|$ ,  $\|\mathbf{g}_F\mathbf{g}_M\|$ ,  $\|\mathbf{g}_F\mathbf{g}_R\|$ ,  $\|\mathbf{g}_E\mathbf{g}_M\|$ ,  $\|\mathbf{g}_E\mathbf{g}_R\|$ , and  $\|\mathbf{g}_M\mathbf{g}_R\|$ . The hippocampus showed larger distances between phases than those in the EC and amygdala.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hippocampus: Distance = 1.11 [1.01], median [IQR],  $n = 195,681$  timepoints; EC: Distance = 0.94 [1.10], median [IQR],  $n = 133,761$  timepoints; Amygdala: Distance = 0.78 [0.88], median [IQR],  $n = 165,281$  timepoints.

<sup>2</sup>Hippocampus: Distance = 0.60 [0.70], median [IQR],  $n = 8,772$  combinations; EC: Distance = 0.28 [0.52], median [IQR],  $n = 5,017$  combinations ( $p < 0.01$ ; Brunner–Munzel test); Amygdala: Distance = 0.24 [0.42], median [IQR],  $n = 7,466$  combinations ( $p < 0.01$ ; Brunner–Munzel test).

### 3.3. Memory-Load-Dependent NT Distance between Encoding and Retrieval States in the Hippocampus

Regarding memory load in the Sternberg task, we observed a negative correlation between the correct rate of trials and the set size, which denotes the number of letters to be encoded (Figure 3A).<sup>3</sup> Concomitantly, a positive correlation was noted between the response time and set size (Figure 3B).<sup>4</sup>

Next, we discovered a positive correlation between set size and the NT distance separating the encoding and retrieval phases ( $\log_{10}||g_{\text{EGR}}||$ ) (Figure 3C).<sup>5</sup> However, distances between other phase combinations did not highlight statistically significant correlations (Figures 3D and ??).

### 3.4. Detection of Hippocampal SWRs from Putative CA1 Regions

~~To enhance the precision~~ The precise localization of recording electrodes within the hippocampus presents significant challenges in human studies, primarily due to the typical unavailability of postmortem histological confirmation. To improve the accuracy of recording sites and SWR detection ~~, we approximated the electrode placements in the~~ in the hippocampus, we established an inclusion criterion that required the electrode to be in the putative CA1 regions of the hippocampus ~~using distinguished~~. This was based on distinct multi-unit spike patterns observed during SWR events compared to baseline periods. SWR<sup>+</sup>/SWR<sup>-</sup> candidates from each session and hippocampal region were

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<sup>3</sup>Correct rate: set size four ( $0.99 \pm 0.11$ , mean  $\pm$ SD;  $n = 333$  trials) vs. set size six ( $0.93 \pm 0.26$ ;  $n = 278$  trials;  $p < 0.001$ , Brunner–Munzel test with Bonferroni correction) and set size eight ( $0.87 \pm 0.34$ ;  $n = 275$  trials;  $p < 0.05$ ; Brunner–Munzel test with Bonferroni correction). Generally,  $p < 0.001$  for Kruskal–Wallis test; correlation coefficient = - 0.20,  $p < 0.001$ .

<sup>4</sup>Response time: set size four ( $1.26 \pm 0.45$  s;  $n = 333$  trials) vs. set size six ( $1.53 \pm 0.91$  s;  $n = 278$  trials) and set size eight ( $1.66 \pm 0.80$  s;  $n = 275$  trials). All comparisons  $p < 0.001$ , Brunner–Munzel test with Bonferroni correction;  $p < 0.001$  for Kruskal–Wallis test; correlation coefficient = 0.22,  $p < 0.001$

<sup>5</sup>Correlation between set size and  $\log_{10}||g_{\text{EGR}}||$ : correlation coefficient = 0.05,  $p < 0.001$ . Specific values:  $||g_{\text{EGR}}|| = 0.54$  [0.70] for set size four,  $n = 447$ ;  $||g_{\text{EGR}}|| = 0.58$  [0.66] for set size six,  $n = 381$ ;  $||g_{\text{EGR}}|| = 0.61$  [0.63] for set size eight,  $n = 395$ .

embedded in two-dimensional space using UMAP (Figure 4A).<sup>6</sup> With the silhouette score as a quality metric for clustering (Figure 4B and Table 2), recording sites demonstrating an average silhouette score exceeding 0.6 across all sessions were identified as putative CA1 regions.<sup>7</sup> (Tables 2 and 3). We identified five putative CA1 regions, four of which were not indicated as seizure onset zones (Table 1).

Subsequently,  $\text{SWR}^+/\text{SWR}^-$  candidates within these putative CA1 regions were labeled as  $\text{SWR}^+$  and  $\text{SWR}^-$ , respectively<sup>8</sup> (Table 3). Both  $\text{SWR}^+$  and  $\text{SWR}^-$  manifested identical durations<sup>9</sup> due to their definitions and followed a log-normal distribution (Figure 4C). During the initial 400 ms of the retrieval phase, an increase in  $\text{SWR}^+$  incidence was found<sup>10</sup> (Figure 4D). The peak ripple band amplitude of  $\text{SWR}^+$  surpassed that of  $\text{SWR}^-$  and followed a log-normal distribution (Figure 4E).<sup>11</sup>

### 3.5. Transient Change in Hippocampal NT during SWR

We assessed the 'distance' of the NT from the origin ( $O$ ) during SWR events in both encoding and retrieval phases (Figure 5A). Observing the increase in distance during SWR, as illustrated in Figure 5A, we categorized each SWR into three stages: pre-, mid-, and post-SWR. Hence, the distances from the origin  $O$  during those SWR intervals are identified as  $\|\text{pre-eSWR}^+\|$ ,  $\|\text{mid-eSWR}^+\|$  and others.

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<sup>6</sup>Consider the AHL in session #1 of subject #1 as a case in point.

<sup>7</sup>The identified regions were the AHL of subject #1, AHR of subject #3, PHL of subject #4, AHL of subject #6, and AHR of subject #9.

<sup>8</sup>These definitions produced equal counts for both categories:  $\text{SWR}^+$  ( $n = 1,170$ ) and  $\text{SWR}^-$  ( $n = 1,170$ ).

<sup>9</sup>These definitions result in equal durations for both categories:  $\text{SWR}^+$  (93.0 [65.4] ms) and  $\text{SWR}^-$  (93.0 [65.4] ms).

<sup>10</sup> $\text{SWR}^+$  increased against the bootstrap sample; 95th percentile = 0.42 [Hz];  $p < 0.05$ .

<sup>11</sup> $\text{SWR}^+$  (3.05 [0.85] SD of baseline, median [IQR];  $n = 1,170$ ) vs.  $\text{SWR}^-$  (2.37 [0.33] SD of baseline, median [IQR];  $n = 1,170$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ; Brunner–Munzel test).

As a result,  $\|\text{mid-eSWR}^+\|^{12}$  exceeded  $\|\text{pre-eSWR}^+\|^{13}$ , and  $\|\text{mid-rSWR}^+\|^{14}$  was larger than  $\|\text{pre-rSWR}^+\|$  in both the Match IN and Mismatch OUT tasks.<sup>15</sup>

### 3.6. *Visualization of Hippocampal NT during SWR in Two-Dimensional Spaces*

Having observed NT 'jumping' during SWR (Figure 5), we visualized the three-dimensional NTs of pre-, mid-, and post-SWR events during the encoding and retrieval phases (Figure ??). The distance between these was found to be memory-load dependent (Figure 3). To provide two-dimensional visualization, we linearly aligned peri-SWR NTs by setting  $\mathbf{g}_E$  at the origin  $(0, 0)$  and  $\mathbf{g}_R$  at  $(\|\mathbf{g}_{EGR}\|, 0)$ . Subsequently, we rotated these aligned NTs around the  $\mathbf{g}_{EGR}$  axis (the x axis), ensuring that the distances from the origin  $O$  in the original three-dimensional spaces and angles from  $\overrightarrow{\mathbf{g}_{EGR}}$  are retained in the two-dimensional equivalent. Scatter plot visualization of NTs within these two-dimensional spaces revealed distinct distributions of peri-SWR NTs based on phases and task types. A notable example of this is the observation that the magnitude of  $\|\text{mid-eSWR}^+\|$  exceeds that of  $\|\text{pre-eSWR}^+\|$  (Figure ??B), which is consistent with our previous observations (Figure 5).

### 3.6. *Fluctuations of Hippocampal NTs between Encoding and Retrieval States*

Subsequently, we investigated the 'direction' of the NT in relation to  $\overrightarrow{\mathbf{g}_{EGR}}$ , which was found to be dependent on memory load (Figure 3). The directions of the SWRs were determined by the NT at  $-250$  ms and  $+250$

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<sup>12</sup>1.25 [1.30], median [IQR],  $n = 1,281$  in Match IN task; 1.12 [1.35], median [IQR],  $n = 1,163$  in Mismatch OUT task

<sup>13</sup>1.08 [1.07], median [IQR],  $n = 1,149$  in Match IN task; 0.90 [1.12], median [IQR],  $n = 1,088$  in Mismatch OUT task

<sup>14</sup>1.32 [1.24], median [IQR],  $n = 935$  in Match IN task; 1.15 [1.26], median [IQR],  $n = 891$  in Mismatch OUT task

<sup>15</sup>1.19 [0.96], median [IQR],  $n = 673$  in Match IN task; 0.94 [0.88], median [IQR],  $n = 664$  in Mismatch OUT task

ms from their center, denoted as, for example,  $\overrightarrow{\text{eSWR}^+}$ . We calculated the cosine similarities between  $\overrightarrow{\text{g}_{\text{EGR}}}$ ,  $\overrightarrow{\text{eSWR}^+}$ , and  $\overrightarrow{\text{rSWR}^+}$  in both SWR ( $\text{SWR}^+$ ) and baseline periods ( $\text{SWR}^-$ ) (Figure 6A–D).

$\overrightarrow{\text{rSWR}^+} \cdot \overrightarrow{\text{g}_{\text{EGR}}}$  exhibited a biphasic distribution. By computing the difference between the distribution of  $\overrightarrow{\text{rSWR}^+} \cdot \overrightarrow{\text{g}_{\text{EGR}}}$  (Figure 6A & B) and that of  $\overrightarrow{\text{rSWR}^-} \cdot \overrightarrow{\text{g}_{\text{EGR}}}$  (Figure 6C & D), we were able to determine the contributions of SWR (Figure 6E & F), which indicated a shift in the direction of  $\overrightarrow{\text{g}_{\text{EGR}}}$  (Figure 6E & F: *red rectangles*).

Furthermore,  $\overrightarrow{\text{eSWR}^+} \cdot \overrightarrow{\text{rSWR}^+}$  was less than  $\overrightarrow{\text{eSWR}^-} \cdot \overrightarrow{\text{rSWR}^-}$  strictly in Mismatch OUT task (Figure 6F: *pink circles*). In other words, eSWR and rSWR pointed in the opposite direction exclusively in Mismatch OUT task but not Match IN task (Figure 6E: *pink circles*).

#### 4. Discussion

This study hypothesizes that in low-dimensional spaces during a WM task in humans, hippocampal neurons ~~form unique~~ exhibit WM-task dependent NTs, primarily during SWR periods. Initially, multi-unit spikes in the MTL regions were projected onto three-dimensional spaces during a Sternberg task using GPFA (Figure 1D–E & Figure 2A). The NT distances across WM phases ( $\|\text{g}_{\text{FGE}}\|$ ,  $\|\text{g}_{\text{FGM}}\|$ ,  $\|\text{g}_{\text{FGR}}\|$ ,  $\|\text{g}_{\text{EGM}}\|$ ,  $\|\text{g}_{\text{EGR}}\|$ , and  $\|\text{g}_{\text{MGR}}\|$ ) were significantly larger in the hippocampus compared to the EC and amygdala (Figure 2C–E), ~~indicating dynamic and responsive neural activity in the hippocampus during the WM task~~. Also, in the hippocampus, the NT distance between the encoding and retrieval phases ( $\|\text{g}_{\text{FGE}}\|$ ) ~~correlated positively~~ positively correlated with memory load (Figure 3C–D), ~~reflecting WM processing~~. The hippocampal ~~neural~~ NT transiently expanded during SWRs (Figure 5). Lastly, the hippocampal ~~neural~~ NT alternated between encoding and retrieval states, transitioning from encoding to retrieval during SWR events (Figure 6). These findings explain aspects of hippocampal neural activity during a WM task in humans and offer new insights into SWRs as a state-switching element in hippocampal neural states.

The ~~distance of the neural NT across the phases was significantly longer~~ longer distance of NTs across the four phases in the hippocampus ~~compared to the EC and amygdala, even when considering the distance from  $O$  in these regions (Figure 2C–E). This establishes the involvement of the hippocampus in~~ indicates dynamic and responsive neural activity in the hippocampus during the WM task, ~~corroborating~~. This observation corroborates previous studies indicating hippocampal persistent firing during the maintenance phase [3] [4] [5] [6] [4, 5, 6, 3]. However, in the present study, applying GPFA to multi-unit activity during a one-second level resolution of the WM task revealed that the ~~neural~~ NT in low-dimensional space presented a memory-load dependency between the encoding and retrieval phases, denoted as  $\|g_{\text{EGR}}\|$  (Figure 3). These findings support the association of the hippocampus with WM processing.

Our analysis focused on putative CA1 regions (Figure 4) ~~in order to enhance the validity of recording site and the true positive rate of SWR detection. This criterion~~ is supported by ~~several factors. This specific focus results from established observations that~~ accumulated evidence. For instance, SWRs synchronize with ~~spike bursts of~~ interneuron and pyramidal neuron ~~spike bursts [61] [62] [63] [64] [61, 62, 63, 64],~~ potentially within a 50  $\mu\text{m}$  radius of the recording site [65]. ~~Furthermore~~ Additionally, we identified ~~an~~ increased incidence of SWRs during the first 0–400 ms of the retrieval phase (Figure 4D). This finding aligns with previous reports of heightened SWR occurrence preceding spontaneous verbal recall [21] [22], ~~supporting our results under [21, 22],~~ extending our understanding to a triggered retrieval condition. ~~The observed~~ Moreover, the log-normal distributions of both SWR duration and ripple band peak amplitude ~~observed~~ in this study (Figure 4C & E) coincide with the ~~current~~ consensus in this field [56]. ~~Consequently, our decision to limit recording sites to putative CA1 regions likely contributed to improving the precision, or true positive rate, of SWR detection. Although, Therefore, these results support the electrode placement and detected SWRs in this study. One could argue that~~ the NT distance increase from  $O$  during

SWRs (Figure 5) ~~might~~ may be artificially inflated towards higher values due to channel selection using UMAP clustering on spike counts. However, this potential bias does not ~~substantially challenge our main findings~~ affect the direction of NT, the memory-load dependency, nor the WM task dependency identified in this study.

Interestingly, during the retrieval phase, NT directions alternated between encoding and retrieval states during both baseline and SWR periods in a task-dependent manner (Figure 6C & D). Additionally, the balance of this fluctuation transitioned from encoding to retrieval state during SWR events (Figure 6 E & F). These results align with previous studies on the role of SWR in memory retrieval ~~[21]~~ [22] [21, 22]. Our findings suggest that (i) neuronal oscillation between encoding and retrieval states occurs during a WM task and (ii) SWR events serve as indicators of the transition in hippocampal neural states from encoding to retrieval during a WM task.

Moreover, our study noted differences specific to the WM-task type between encoding- and retrieval-SWRs (Figure 6E-F). Notably, opposing movements of encoding-SWR (eSWR) and retrieval-SWR (rSWR) were not observed in Match IN task but were apparent in Mismatch OUT task. Memory engram theory [66] might explain these observations: Match In task presented participants with previously shown letters, while Mismatch OUT task introduced a new letter absent in the encoding phase. This explanation underscores the significant role of SWR in human cognitive processes.

~~The application of log-transformation to NT distances influences the correlation analysis in this study (Figure 3C & D), although other statistical tests performed are nonparametric and not affected by the log-transformation. Moreover, The use of log-transformation is justified from several perspectives. First, log-normal distributions are prevalent in the central nervous system, including in the firing rate, the weight and conductance of synapses [67] [68] in the hippocampus, and SWR amplitude and duration [56]. Furthermore, GPFA linearly projects neural spike data into a latent space, preserving the temporal structure with Gaussian processes. Therefore, if the input data,~~

~~spike counts in our case, is log-normally distributed, the latent GPFA space should, ideally, reflect the log-normality. Lastly, the empirical observation of the NT distances, as seen in Figure 1, supports the efficacy of our method in detecting subtle differences during baseline periods. Accordingly, the correlation analysis is the only section potentially affected by the use of log-normalization; but this approach will be justified from previous works.~~

In conclusion, this study illustrates that during a WM task in humans, hippocampal activity fluctuate between encoding and retrieval states, uniquely transitioning from encoding to retrieval during SWR events. These findings offer novel insights into the neural correlates and functionality of working memory within the hippocampus.

### Data Availability Statement

The data is available on G-Node (<https://doi.gin.g-node.org/10.12751/g-node.d76994/>).  
The source code is available on GitHub (<https://github.com/yanagisawa-lab/hippocampal-neural-fluctuations-during-a-WM-task-in-humans>).

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## **Contributors**Ethics Declarations

All study participants provided their written informed consent, subsequent to the approval from the pertinent institutional ethics review board (Kantonale Ethikkommission Zürich, PB 2016–02055).

### Author Contributions

Y.W. and T.Y. conceptualized the study; Y.W. performed the data analysis; Y.W. and T.Y. wrote the original draft; and all authors reviewed the final manuscript.

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### **Declaration of Interests**

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

### ~~Data and code availability~~

~~The data is available on G-Node (). The source code is available on GitHub ().~~

### **Inclusion and Diversity Statement**

We support inclusive, diverse, and equitable conduct of research.

### **Declaration of Generative AI in Scientific Writing**

The authors employed ChatGPT, provided by OpenAI, for enhancing the manuscript’s English language quality. After incorporating the suggested improvements, the authors meticulously revised the content. Ultimate responsibility for the final content of this publication rests entirely with the authors.

## Tables

Subject ID	# of sessions	AHL	AHR	PHL	PHR	ECL	ECR	AL	AR	
1	4	✓	n.a.	✓	✓	✓	n.a.	✓	n.a.	A
2	7	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	AI
3	3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	n.a.	AI
4	2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	AHL & AI
5	3	✓	n.a.	n.a.	✓	n.a.	n.a.	✓	n.a.	
6	6	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	AHL & P
7	4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	AI
8	5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
9	2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	E

**Table 1 – Electrode Distribution within the Dataset**

This figure denotes the placements of electrodes and seizure onset zones. Regions marked with ✓ were included in the dataset, while those imprinted with n.a. were absent. The abbreviations used are as follows: AHL, left hippocampal head; AHR, right hippocampal head; PHL, left hippocampal body; PHR, right hippocampal body; ECL, left entorhinal cortex; ECR, right entorhinal cortex; AL, left amygdala; AR, right amygdala; SOZ represents the seizure onset zone.

Subject	AHL	AHR	PHL	PHR
1	$0.60 \pm 0.14$	n.a.	n.a.	$0.1 \pm 0$
2	$0.21 \pm 0.16$	$0.17 \pm 0.21$	$0.18 \pm 0.22$	$0.20 \pm 0.15$
3	$0.40 \pm 0.42$	$0.83 \pm 0.12$	n.a.	n.a.
4	$0.10 \pm 0.00$	$0.10 \pm 0.00$	$0.90 \pm 0.00$	$0.10 \pm 0.14$
5	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
6	$0.63 \pm 0.06$	n.a.	n.a.	$0.27 \pm 0.06$
7	$0.10 \pm 0.00$	$0.35 \pm 0.35$	$0.37 \pm 0.47$	$0.10 \pm 0.00$
8	$0.13 \pm 0.10$	n.a.	$0.28 \pm 0.49$	n.a.
9	n.a.	$0.85 \pm 0.07$	$0.15 \pm 0.07$	n.a.

**Table 2 – Silhouette Score of UMAP Clustering for  $\text{SWR}^+$  Candidates and  $\text{SWR}^-$  Candidates**

The silhouette scores (mean  $\pm$ SD across sessions per subject) for UMAP clustering of  $\text{SWR}^+$  candidates and  $\text{SWR}^-$  candidates are based on their respective multi-unit spike patterns (Figure 4A). The mean scores were 0.205 and the standard deviation was 0.285, calculated for the interquartile range (IQR; Figure 4B).

Subject ID	# of sessions	# of trials	ROI	# of SWRs	SWR incidence [Hz]
#1	2	100	AHL	274	0.34
#3	2	97	AHR	325	0.42
#4	2	99	PHL	202	0.26
#6	2	100	AHL	297	0.37
#9	2	97	AHR	72	0.09
Total = 10		Total = 493		Total = 1170	0.30 $\pm$ 0.13 (mean $\pm$ SD)

**Table 3 – Summary of Detected SWRs**

The table provides statistics of presumptive CA1 regions and SWR events. Only the initial two sessions (sessions 1 and 2) from each subject were included in our analysis to reduce sampling bias.



## Figures

**Figure 1 – Local Field Potentials, Multiunit Activity, and Neural Trajectories in the Hippocampus During a Modified Sternberg Task**

**A.** Representative wideband LFP signals for intracranial EEG recording from the left hippocampal head are presented. This recording took place while the subject performed a modified Sternberg working memory task. Task stages included fixation (1 s, *gray*), encoding (2 s, *blue*), maintenance (3 s, *green*), and retrieval (2 s, *red*). **B.** Displays the associated ripple band LFP traces. Note *purple* and *yellow* rectangles, which denote the timings for  $\text{SWR}^+$  candidates and  $\text{SWR}^-$  candidates, respectively (the latter serving as control events for  $\text{SWR}^+$ ). **C.** A raster plot illustrates multi-unit spikes from the LFP traces. These spikes have been sorted using a spike algorithm [55]. **D.** Shows neural trajectories (NTs) computed by GPFA[46] based on spike counts per unit with 50-ms bins. The geometric median of each phase is marked by dot circles. **E.** Indicates the distance of the NT from the origin point  $O$ .

**Figure 2 – State-Dependent Neural Trajectory of Hippocampal Neurons**

**A.** Neural trajectories (NTs) depicted as a point cloud within the first three-dimensional factors derived from GPFA [46]. The smaller dots represent 50-ms NT bins, and the larger dots with *black* edges denote the geometric medians for each phase in the Sternberg working memory task: fixation ( $\|g_F\|$ , *gray*), encoding ( $\|g_E\|$ , *blue*), maintenance ( $\|g_M\|$ , *green*), and retrieval ( $\|g_R\|$ , *red*). **B.** The figure presents the log-likelihood of the GPFA models versus the number of dimensions used to embed multi-unit spikes found in the medial temporal lobe (MTL) regions. Specifically, the elbow method identified three as the optimal dimension. **C.** This panel displays the distance of the NTs from the origin ( $O$ ) for the hippocampus (Hipp.), entorhinal cortex (EC), and amygdala (Amy.), plotted against the time elapsed from the probe onset. **D.** The NT distance from  $O$  within the MTL regions is shown. The hippocampus has the greatest distance, followed by the EC and the Amygdala. **E.** The box plot illustrates inter-phase NT distances within the MTL regions.

**Figure 3 – Positive Correlation between Memory Load and Neural Trajectory Distance in the Hippocampus between Encoding and Retrieval Phases**

**A.** The relationship between set size (number of letters to be encoded) and accuracy in the working memory task (coefficient =  $-0.20$ ,  $***p < 0.001$ ). **B.** The correlation between set size and response time (coefficient =  $0.23$ ,  $***p < 0.001$ ). **C.** The correlation between set size on the inter-phase distances between the encoding and retrieval phases ( $\|g_{EGR}\|$ ) (correlation coefficient =  $0.05$ ,  $***p < 0.001$ ). **D.** Experimental observations of correlations between set size and the following parameters: accuracy, response time,  $\log_{10} \|g_{FGE}\|$ ,  $\log_{10} \|g_{FGM}\|$ ,  $\log_{10} \|g_{FGR}\|$ ,  $\log_{10} \|g_{EGM}\|$ ,  $\log_{10} \|g_{EGR}\|$ , and  $\log_{10} \|g_{MGR}\|$  represented by *red* dots. The kernel density plots (*gray*) illustrate the corresponding shuffled surrogate with set size ( $n = 1,000$ ) ( $***ps < 0.001$ ).

#### Figure 4 – Detection of SWRs in Putative CA1 Regions

**A.** Two-dimensional UMAP [58] projection displays multi-unit spikes during  $\text{SWR}^+$  candidates (*purple*) and  $\text{SWR}^-$  candidates (*yellow*). **B.** A cumulative density plot indicates silhouette scores, reflecting UMAP clustering quality (see Table 2). Hippocampal regions with silhouette scores exceeding 0.60 (equivalent to the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile) are identified as putative CA1 regions.  $\text{SWR}^+$  and  $\text{SWR}^-$  candidates, which were recorded from these regions, are classified as  $\text{SWR}^+$  and  $\text{SWR}^-$  respectively ( $ns = 1,170$ ). **C.** Identical distributions of ~~durations are presented for~~  $\text{SWR}^+$  (*purple*) and  $\text{SWR}^-$  (*yellow*) distributions, based on their definitions (93.0 [65.4] ms, median [IQR]). Note that these distributions exhibit log-normality. **D.** Identical SWR incidence for both  $\text{SWR}^+$  (*purple*) and  $\text{SWR}^-$  (*yellow*), relative to the probe’s timing ~~is illustrated as a~~ (mean  $\pm 95\%$  confidence interval). However, ~~intervals 95% confidence interval~~ may not be visibly apparent due to their ~~confined narrow ranges, be aware.~~ Note that a significant SWR incidence increase was detected during the initial 400 ms of the retrieval phase (0.421 [Hz],  $*p < 0.05$ , bootstrap test). **E.** Distributions of ripple band peak amplitudes for  $\text{SWR}^-$  (*yellow*; 2.37 [0.33] SD of baseline, median [IQR]) and  $\text{SWR}^+$  (*purple*; 3.05 [0.85] SD of baseline, median [IQR]) are manifested ( $***p < 0.001$ , the Brunner–Munzel test). Note the log-normality for  $\text{SWR}^+$  events.

**Figure 5 – Transient Change in Neural Trajectory during SWR**

**A.** The distance from origin ( $O$ ) of the peri-sharp-wave-ripple neural trajectory (mean  $\pm 95\%$  confidence interval). The intervals may be obscured due to their minimal ranges. **B.** The distance from the origin ( $O$ ) during the pre-, mid-, and post-SWR periods is demonstrated ( $*p < 0.05$ ,  $**p < 0.01$ ,  $***p < 0.001$ ; Brunner–Munzel test applied). Abbreviations: SWR, sharp-wave ripple events; eSWR, SWR during the encoding phase; rSWR, SWR within the retrieval phase;  $\text{SWR}^+$ , positive SWR event;  $\text{SWR}^-$ , control events for  $\text{SWR}^+$ ; pre-, mid-, or post-SWR refer to the time intervals from  $-800$  to  $-250$  ms, from  $-250$  to  $+250$  ms, or from  $+250$  to  $+800$  ms, respectively, all relative to the SWR center.

## ~~Visualization of Neural Trajectory During SWR in~~

### ~~Two-Dimensional Space~~

~~The panels depict hippocampal neural trajectories (NTs) during SWR projected onto two-dimensional spaces. **A.**~~

~~Shows the hippocampal NTs as point clouds during pre-SWR<sup>-</sup> (*gray*), mid-SWR<sup>-</sup> (*yellow*), and post-SWR<sup>-</sup> (*black*). **B.** Conveys the equivalent~~

~~for SWR<sup>+</sup> rather than SWR<sup>-</sup>. The projection was executed as follows:~~

~~First, a linear transformation placed  $\mathbf{g}_E$  at the origin  $O(0,0)$ , and  $\mathbf{g}_R$  at  $(\|\mathbf{g}_{EGR}\|, 0)$ . The point cloud was subsequently rotated around the  $\mathbf{g}_{EGR}$  axis (similar to the x-axis) for adaptation to two-dimensional spaces. Thus,~~

~~within these two-dimensional spaces, the distances from point  $O$  and the angles for the  $\mathbf{g}_{EGR}$  axis are retained as in the original three-dimensional spaces created by GPFA. Abbreviations: SWR denotes sharp-wave ripple~~

~~events; eSWR refers to SWR during the encoding phase; rSWR signals SWR during the retrieval phase; SWR<sup>+</sup>, characterizes an SWR event;~~

~~SWR<sup>-</sup> signifies control events for SWR<sup>+</sup>; pre-SWR, mid-SWR, or~~

~~post-SWR, represent the time intervals from -800 to -250 ms, from -250 to +250 ms, or from +250 to +800 ms from the center of the SWR.~~

**Figure 6 – Direction of Neural Trajectory During SWR Based on Encoding and Retrieval States**

**A–B** The kernel density estimation distributions of  $\overrightarrow{\text{eSWR}^+} \cdot \overrightarrow{\text{rSWR}^+}$  (*pink circles*),  $\overrightarrow{\text{eSWR}^+} \cdot \overrightarrow{\text{g}_{EGR}}$  (*blue triangles*), and  $\overrightarrow{\text{rSWR}^+} \cdot \overrightarrow{\text{g}_{EGR}}$  (*red rectangles*) in Match In (A) and Mismatch OUT tasks (B). **C–D** The corresponding distributions of SWR<sup>-</sup> instead of those of SWR<sup>+</sup> in A and B. **E–F** The differences in the distributions of SWR<sup>+</sup> and those of SWR<sup>-</sup>, showing SWR components ( $E = C - A$  &  $F = D - B$ ). Biphasic distributions of  $\overrightarrow{\text{rSWR}^-} \cdot \overrightarrow{\text{g}_{EGR}}$  indicate fluctuations between the encoding and retrieval states during the Sternberg task. Also, contradicting directionality between  $\overrightarrow{\text{eSWR}^+}$  and  $\overrightarrow{\text{rSWR}^+}$  was observed (pink circles) not in Match IN task (**E**), but in Mismatch OUT task (**F**). Lastly, transitions from the retrieval to encoding states are evident in the SWR components in both Match IN and Mismatch OUT tasks (*red rectangles* in E–F).