WAYS OF BEING COMMUNAL –
USING THE EXAMPLE OF STRUER TRACKS

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Abstract: This thesis examines how a purpose-designed Almanac can operate in the specific context of Struer Tracks 2025, both as a complementary curatorial strategy and as a communal practice that distributes authorship and sustains dialogue around sonic art's inherently elusive character. It asks: how can a hybrid publication extend the biennial act of communal listening rather than merely interpret it?

Methodologically, the study combines: (1) a critical literature review to frame epistemic, sonic, and curatorial debates; (2) a single-informant case study via a qualitative interview with the 2025 festival curator, Jacob Eriksen; and (3) autoethnography supported by primary document analysis (programmes, calls, drafts, correspondence). All materials were thematically analysed against the research question.

The case centres on Struer Tracks 5 (14–16 August 2025) and its twin-titled theme Kommunal Praksis (Communal Practice), which retools municipal routines as material for collaborative cultural work while remaining embedded in the local administrative ecology. The Almanac's editorial architecture was built through an inclusive open call (88 outlines received; 54 developed; formats spanning essays to text-plus-audio-visual), positioning the publication as a low-threshold platform for diverse contributors.

Findings indicate that the Almanac broadened participation, pruned elitism by flattening expertise hierarchies, and diversified the discourse around Kommunal Praksis. At the same time, reflexive depth was constrained by limited time and resources; the contributor base skewed towards Europe/North America, and a fully 'slow', care-intensive curatorial tempo proved unattainable. Overall, the project demonstrates that an Almanac can function as

an immanent curatorial device that keeps sound art ‘in motion’ through collective reflection, while making visible the practical limits and situated ethics of communal publishing.

Keywords: sound art; curating; experimental publishing; almanac; care; communal practice; distributed authorship; listening; trembling thinking; utopia; regimes of truth; documentation; autoethnography; biennial; Struer Tracks.

Declaration of Authorship

I, Zlata Pavlovskaia, born on the **26th of October of 1996 in Saint-Petersburg, Russia**, hereby

declare,

1. That I have written my Master Thesis myself, have not used other sources than the ones stated, and moreover have not used any illegal tools or unfair means,

2. That I have not publicized my Master Thesis in my domestic or any foreign country in any form to this date, and/or have not used it as an exam paper.

3. That, in case my Master Thesis concerns my employer or any other external cooperation partner, I have fully informed them about the title, form, and content of the Master Thesis and have his/her permission to include the data and information in my written work.

Aalborg, Denmark 09August.2025 _____

Place, Date Signature

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Introduction

Curating sound invariably courts loss. Unlike painting or sculpture, an installation built from vibration, reverberant architecture, and situated listening disappears the moment it is heard. Textual surrogates — be they critical reviews, programme notes or even high-fidelity recordings — offer little more than a fragmentary trace, omitting the contingent interplay of acoustics, bodily gesture and social encounter through which meaning arises in situ. In response, this thesis, *Ways of Being Communal: The Example of Struer Tracks,* advances two interconnected objectives. First, it asks how a purpose-designed Almanac can supplement Struer Tracks 2025 — Denmark's sound-art and listening biennial. Second, it examines whether the Almanac, developed during my curatorial internship at Sound Art Lab (SAL), can itself perform communal work by distributing authorship and fostering reflexive dialogue among artists, residents and remote interlocutors.

The project therefore sits at the intersection of sound-art studies, curatorial theory, and experimental publishing. Its central **research question** is formulated precisely: *In the specific context of Struer Tracks 2025, how does a once-off, hybrid Almanac operate as both complementary curatorial strategy and communal practice, given the intrinsic difficulties of fixing sound in textual form?*

Methods for describing sound inevitably fail to replicate its phenomenology; yet curators and researchers continue to write, diagram and archive because textual mediation facilitates critical distance, institutional memory, and access for absent publics. The problem, then, is not how to eliminate experiential loss — an impossibility — but how to acknowledge that loss while still enabling collective reflection. The core enquiry is thus neither technical nor purely hermeneutic; it is curatorial and ethical: How might the Almanac extend, rather than merely interpret, the biennial act of communal listening?

Based on the research question and the initial review of theory and context, **several working hypotheses have been formulated**. These hypotheses represent the anticipated ways in which the Almanac might fulfill the aims of communal practice and complementary curating. They will be revisited in the conclusion against the study's findings:

- **Participation:** The Almanac will broaden participation in the biennial by soliciting contributions and interactions beyond the on-site festival audience,

engaging not only visitors physically present in Struer but also remote contributors and readers.

- **Elitism:** The Almanac will reduce elitism in the curatorial process by flattening hierarchies of expertise through shared authorship. (By inviting artists, academics, local voices, and possibly the public to contribute on relatively equal footing, the publication can democratise who gets to interpret and contextualise the art.)
- **Discourse:** The Almanac will deepen and diversify the discourse around the biennial's art and themes by combining heterogeneous formats and perspectives. (Through essays, interviews, and creative pieces, it is expected to generate richer discussion and multiple viewpoints, rather than a single curatorial narrative.)
- **Reflection:** The Almanac will promote critical reflection on Struer Tracks by making curatorial decisions and festival contexts more transparent and debatable. (By documenting curatorial rationales, behind-the-scenes processes, and participants' responses, it should stimulate critical thinking about the festival's content and methods, both among contributors and readers.)

These expectations are intentionally ambitious; not all may be fully realised. However, they provide clear criteria that guide the analysis in later chapters. The thesis will evaluate each hypothesis in light of the evidence gathered, identifying to what extent the Almanac achieved these goals and what factors facilitated or impeded its success.

Methodology

To investigate the research question, the study adopts a qualitative, multi-method methodology. Several approaches were considered, but ultimately three entwined strands were selected to balance conceptual breadth with contextual depth:

First, a critical literature review establishes the conceptual framework for the study. This involves surveying relevant scholarship on the documentation of sound art and on participatory or collaborative curatorial practices. By reviewing prior work – for example, writings on the ephemerality of media art and strategies for its preservation, as well as theories of curating that emphasise relational and community-engaged approaches – the thesis situates itself within existing debates and identifies key gaps. This theoretical groundwork (covered especially in Chapters 1 and 2) ensures that the research builds on existing knowledge and clearly articulates its original contribution.

Second, an in-depth case study of Struer Tracks 2025 is conducted, centred on a qualitative interview. The case study method was chosen to ground the research in a real-world context where the Almanac experiment is actually being implemented. Within this case, an

interview was carried out with Jacob Eriksen – the curator of Struer Tracks 2025 – to gather insider insights into the biennial's curatorial vision, the motivations behind the Almanac, and the challenges encountered. The interview format allows for nuanced understanding of the curator's perspective, shedding light on intentions and decision-making processes that are not fully documented in public materials. This expert testimony is invaluable for interpreting how the Almanac is intended to function as part of the festival's broader curatorial strategy. The use of a single key informant (the chief curator) was considered sufficient in this context, given that the study's focus is tightly bound to the curator's initiative; however, the interview data are later triangulated with other sources to strengthen validity.

Third, the research incorporates an autoethnographic component, combined with analysis of primary documents. As the author of this thesis has direct involvement in the Almanac's editorial team, an autoethnographic research diary was kept throughout the internship and publication process. This diary captures first-hand observations, reflections on editorial meetings, and day-to-day notes on how the Almanac content evolved. Autoethnography was chosen as a method to leverage the researcher's dual role as participant and observer – providing a rich, reflective account of the project from the inside. To complement this subjective lens, various documents and artefacts related to Struer Tracks and the Almanac were collected and analyzed: for instance, festival programmes and schedules, calls for contributions, draft layouts or manuscripts of the Almanac, and correspondence (emails, editorial guidelines, feedback from contributors). Examining these materials allows the study to document the process and outcomes of the Almanac initiative with some objectivity. By combining personal narrative with document analysis, the research gains a triangulated perspective: the autoethnography offers depth and context, while the documents provide concrete evidence of what the Almanac did (or did not) achieve.

The three selected methods – literature review, curator interview, and autoethnographic documentation – together create a layered approach suitable for answering the research question. They enable the thesis to connect theory with practice, and individual experience with collective context. All qualitative data (interview transcripts, diary entries, documents) were thematically analysed with the research question in mind, ensuring that findings from each strand inform the overall evaluation of the Almanac's role and impact. The methodology thus provides a robust framework to examine whether the Almanac can broaden participation, democratise curation, deepen discourse, and prolong engagement with sound art in a meaningful way.

The dissertation is organised into five substantive chapters, framed by an introduction and a conclusion, each building cumulatively toward an evaluation of the Almanac as a communal curatorial strategy for Struer Tracks 2025.

Chapter 1 – Polycrisis and Epistemological Detours: From Totality to Trembling Thinking establishes the philosophical footing. Drawing on Blaga, Lyotard, Foucault, Glissant and others, it argues that the present "polycrisis" dissolves confidence in universal knowledge and calls for relational, archipelagic modes of thought. Sound's inherent elusiveness is presented as a practical test case for this epistemic shift.

Chapter 2 – Curating After the Shift: From Authorial to Relational traces the historical reconfiguration of curatorial practice, from Szeemann's auteur model to contemporary participatory and networked approaches. Situating Struer Tracks within this trajectory, the chapter identifies a professional turn towards facilitation, collaboration and distributed authorship—conditions that make the Almanac experiment both timely and necessary.

Chapter 3 – Writing the Unwriteable: Textual Strategies for Sound Art confronts the hermeneutic problem of "writing sound". Through a critical survey of existing documentation practices, it theorises how textual, visual and digital devices either arrest or extend sonic experience. The discussion positions the Almanac as an alternative, processual form of writing-with-sound rather than writing-about-sound.

Chapter 4 – Biennials and the Case of Struer Tracks 2025 offers an in-depth case study. After outlining biennial genealogies and the local context of Struer, it analyses how the 2025 edition operationalises the theme *Kommunal Praksis*. Particular attention is paid to the curatorial rationale behind launching the Almanac, using material from the semi-structured interview with the festival curator.

Chapter 5 – Embodied Editing: Curating an Almanac Recounts the genesis and editorial architecture of the Almanac itself. Drawing on auto-ethnographic diary entries, interview material and primary documents, it narrates the day-to-day processes—conceptual groundwork, content gathering, design decisions and modes of distribution—that shape the publication. In doing so, it prepares the evidential ground for the subsequent assessment of the thesis hypotheses.

Conclusion: Revisits the research question in light of the foregoing analysis. It evaluates the Almanac against four analytical criteria—participation, elitism, discourse and reflection—thereby testing the study's hypotheses. The chapter summarises key findings, acknowledges methodological limitations and offers practical guidelines for curators working with sonic or other ephemeral media.

This structure leads the reader from theoretical framing, through institutional and empirical analysis, to a reflexive evaluation of how experimental publishing can extend and complicate communal listening within a sound-art biennial.

Chapter 1: Polycrisis & Epistemological Detours: From Totality to Trembling Thinking

1.1. Classical Drive toward Totality

Reflecting on humanity, Boris Groys writes: "Traditionally, the main occupation of human culture was the search for totality" (Groys, 2016, p. 12). He identifies the drive towards totality as a desire that has directly shaped forms of cultural production throughout history. In his view, culture has over the centuries tried to overcome the particular and the fragmentary in favour of the universal and the holistic. This aspiration is not only epistemological but also ontological and political in character:

> "This search was dictated by the desire of human subjects to overcome their own particularity, to get rid of the specific 'points of view' that were defined by their 'life forms' and to gain access to a general, universal worldview that would be valid everywhere and at every time" (Groys, 2016, p. 12).

The wish to transcend one's own limitations, to discard the local, the bodily, and the contextual in favour of the universal, according to Groys, is nothing other than a striving for freedom: "We know that the particular is always subsumed, subjected to the whole. So the desire for totality is simply the desire for freedom" (Groys, 2016, p. 12).

For Groys, the idea of totality expresses the existential impulse of the human being to move beyond finite, temporal, and particular existence.Yet the very wish to step outside one's own limits already presupposes that there is something outside them to be grasped. This imagined horizon is not just a broader viewpoint, but essentially reality as a whole. In other words, the pursuit of totality assumes the possibility of an all-encompassing truth that would situate every individual perspective within a single intelligible whole. Thus freedom, in Groys's account, is inseparable from the hope that such truth can be known and shared.

For centuries, the West tied knowledge to universality: Plato's anamnesis[1]; Augustine's credo ut intellegam[2]; Kant's autonomy of reason[3]; Hegel's "absolute knowledge."[4] Different programs, one conviction: thought can comprehend reality as an integrated whole.

[1] Anamnesis—knowledge as recollection; cf. *Plato, Theaetetus* 150d (and *Meno* 81c–86c).
[2] 'Believe so that you may understand'; *Augustine, Tractates on the Gospel of John* 29.6.
[3] 'Sapere aude!'—have the courage to use your own understanding; *Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?"* (1784).
[4] Absolute knowing as the coincidence of subject and object; *Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit* §808.

1.2 Twentieth-Century Critique of Universal Knowledge

Modern scientific rationality inherited this conviction of a systematic, all-embracing description of the world; knowledge remained the medium through which the subject strove for totality — until twentieth-century thought began its radical critique of that aspiration.

One example of the modern re-examination of knowledge as a path to totality is the epistemology of Lucian Blaga, set out in *Transcendental Censorship* (1934). Unlike the classical Western systems that assumed the possibility of positive access to the ground of being, Blaga posits *transcendental censorship* — a structural limit embedded in human cognition itself. This censorship prevents the subject of the cognitive act from positively transcending the boundaries of the ontic order and thus renders any complete coincidence of knowledge and object impossible. The only notion that can cross this limit — while remaining within what the censorship allows — is *the idea of mystery*, and even that solely as an *idea-in-the-negative*, i.e., an awareness of absence or incompleteness: "The idea of mystery expresses the awareness of a shortcoming in the objective of knowledge, an essential deficiency that can be substituted by an accidental presence" (Blaga, 1934/2018, p. 65).

Precisely by virtue of this negative structure, the concept of *mystery* becomes, for Blaga, a way of accessing the transcendent without violating the imposed restrictions: "The transcending act via the idea in the negative is accepted since, by this act, the intentions and the purpose of censorship are not contravened" (Blaga, 1934/2018, p. 67).

Knowledge is therefore defined not by its truth-based identity, but by its recognition of a boundary and by its work with what remains inaccessible. Blaga names this regime *Luciferian knowledge* — a form of individualised knowing that strives toward the transcendent while having to remain within irreducible mystery: "Luciferian knowledge is in no way able to convert existential mystery into non-mystery. It is only able to integrate itself into mystery as such" (Blaga, 1934/2018, p. 67).

Philosophy, Blaga concludes, should be conceived not as *sub specie aeternitatis* (Latin, 'under the aspect of eternity') or *sub specie temporis* ('under the aspect of time'), but as *sub specie mysterii* ('under the aspect of mystery') — from a perspective in which knowing does not eliminate the unfathomable, but rather relates to it as the constitutive horizon of thought itself. From such a standpoint the attainment of the totality of which Groys writes is acknowledged as impossible; and in accepting this, the human being consents to the impossibility of achieving ontological completeness of knowledge.

In 1960s-1970s Europe, the crisis of the social and human sciences became sharper still. The consequences of two world wars, the rapid development of technology, the passage to a post-industrial society, and the transformation of the structure of human experience once again shed doubt on earlier epistemological foundations, giving way to a renewed need to rethink the very nature of knowledge and its functions. Against this background, 1979 saw Jean-François Lyotard publish *The Postmodern Condition* (*La Condition postmoderne*), where he registers a change in the status of knowledge. He argues that, at least since the late 1950s, metanarratives — universal ideological systems that claim a monopoly on truth — have been disintegrating. These "grand narratives" are characterised by a striving for totality and hegemony, subordinating other forms of discourse. After the catastrophes of the twentieth century, especially after the Second World War, trust in such narratives weakened significantly. They are replaced by fragmented, local "little narratives" that make no claim to universality. Thus, whereas *Blaga* stresses the limits of human cognition, *Lyotard* takes the next step, emphasising the problematic character of the very belief in objectivity.

Simultaneously with the move into the post-industrial era, knowledge loses the status of a self-valuable category. Instead it is increasingly treated as a commodity that can be produced, sold, and consumed. Lyotard writes: "Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold; it is and will be consumed in order to be valorised in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange." (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. 4)

Knowledge is thereby subjected to market logic and loses its autonomy: it is expected to be measurable, to yield practical utility, and to deliver a definite result.

Under these conditions the control of knowledge becomes not only an academic or cultural issue but also a political one. Lyotard notes: "Knowledge in the form of an informational commodity indispensable to productive power is already, and will continue to be, a major — perhaps the major — stake in the worldwide competition for power." (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. 5).) Subsequent decades have confirmed the point: from the race for semiconductor supremacy to today's conflicts over data governance and AI regulation, informational knowledge remains the currency of geopolitical influence.

The key question therefore arises: who exactly is entitled to decide what counts as knowledge? Who possesses the power to determine its legitimacy, significance, and justice?

Instead of the stable hierarchies that typify modernity, Lyotard portrays the post-modern as a *network of communication nodes* in which every individual is caught up in numerous *language games* — a conceptual-analytic term borrowed from Ludwig Wittgenstein. In *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein urged that language be viewed not as a system

that mirrors the world, but as “a set of practices” bound to concrete situations and rules of use. Lyotard pushes that insight into social philosophy, claiming that in post-modernity the social bond is no longer institutionally given but arises through communicative positioning: “Young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, a person is always located at ‘nodal points’ of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be… No one, not even the least-privileged among us, is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee, or referent.” (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. 15)

Language thus becomes not merely a medium of expression,but the very *fabric* of sociality.

Lyotard’s rethinking of the social bond yields a linguistic theory of society in which the primary unit of analysis is the language game, not the subject. Even the inquiry into sociality is itself such a game: “The question of the social bond, insofar as it is a question, is itself a language game, the game of inquiry, which immediately positions the one asking, the addressee, and the referent that is asked about.” (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. 15)

Social life, then, is not a fixed structure,but a *dynamic of positioning* within many pragmatic situations.

Crucially, language is never a neutral conduit of information; it is always agonistic: “These ‘moves’ necessarily provoke ‘countermoves’; and everyone knows that a countermove that is merely reactional is not a ‘good’ move.” (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. 16) Reducing utterances to sheer information, he adds, “means adopting a viewpoint that unduly privileges the system’s own interests.” (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. 16)

As every utterance is a potential act of influence or resistance, a communicative situation can never be equated with a mere data transfer.

The value of institutions is reinterpreted accordingly. Institutions are not absolute frameworks but provisional stabilisations of language strategies: they “privilege certain classes of statements” and “impose restrictions on the games.” Yet even these limits are themselves stakes that can shift: “*Yes, if the university opens creative workshops; yes, if the cabinet works with prospective scenarios; yes, if the limits of the old institution are displaced. Reciprocally, the boundaries only stabilize when they cease to be stakes in the game*” (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. 17–18).

Michel Foucault discusses parallel notions in an interview with Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino. Conducting the last section of the interview in written form, Foucault writes : “Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint.

And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth…" (Foucault, 1980, p. 131).

Foucault proposes to redefine knowledge as more than just the result of institutional production, viewing it as a form of power embedded in everyday practices. He shows that power is not centralised and does not belong to any single subject but functions as a network: "Power must be analysed as something which circulates… It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands… It is employed and exercised through a net-like organization… individuals are always in a position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power" (Foucault, 1980, p. 98).

In this context power becomes less overt yet no less effective: it operates not through direct violence but through processes of normalisation — via rules, procedures, and institutional expectations. Teachers, doctors, administrators — all become elements of this ramified network. For Foucault, the critique of knowledge involves not merely exposing external pressure but also an ethical task: learning to recognise power where it masks itself as objectivity, care, or neutrality. In such a situation the task of the subject is to cultivate reflexive skills, as Lyotardian distrust of metanarratives, and the ability to notice one's own participation in power relations and to take responsibility for one's ethical choices.

In the wake of Lyotard's disintegration of metanarratives and Foucault's insistence that every "regime of truth" is knotted to dispersed relations of power, the very project of grounding knowledge in a single, unifying perspective appears untenable. Yet if universal certitude is abandoned, the question remains: how can diverse communities still converse, cooperate and imagine a shared world? One answer is to recast truth itself as relational rather than totalising. It is precisely at this point that Édouard Glissant's socio-cultural poetics becomes salient. Glissant does not look for a new master-narrative; instead he elaborates a model in which knowledge is generated through *relation* — a continual traffic among heterogeneous points of view that never collapse into sameness. His figure of the archipelago offers a concrete image of such plurality-in-connection, signalling a way to think with difference rather than against it.

1.3 Relational and Archipelagic Epistemologies

Thinking about possible means of collective *co-existance*, the philosopher and writer Édouard Glissant offers the metaphor of the archipelago as a model for re-imagining cultural connections in today's world. He declares: "I think the idea of the archipelago — as a place where we can begin to understand and resolve the contradictions of the world — should be

propagated." (Glissant & Obrist, 2021, p. 19). Here, Glissant's *resolve* does not imply a final, utilisable 'solution'; rather, it points to an ongoing relational negotiation that resists closure, in keeping with post-humanist critiques of instrumental reason.

For Glissant the archipelago is a structure in which difference and interdependence co-exist: "…across their many islands, interdependence and difference coexist." (Glissant & Obrist, 2021, p. 18).

Such imagery opposes the heavy, unity-oriented "continental" mentality: "Continents weigh us down. They are thick and sumptuous." (Glissant & Obrist, 2021, p. 20). By contrast, archipelagos admit multiplicity, divergence, and openness: "Archipelagos are able to diffract, they create diversity and expansiveness, they are spaces of relation that recognize all the infinite details of the real." (Glissant & Obrist, 2021, p. 20-21).

This logic continues in Glissant's distinction between globality and globalisation. He understands globality as a field of multiple, non-hierarchical relations that let new things emerge from encounters with difference: "Globality does not homogenize culture. It produces a difference from which new things can emerge." (Glissant & Obrist, 2021, p. 22). Globalisation, by contrast, acts reductively as a cultural neutralizer: "Globalization standardizes and dilutes. Globalization reduces communities to a single model, attacking them from the top down, diminishing them." (Glissant & Obrist, 2021, pp. 22–23). Thus globalisation extends a colonial logic of unification, whereas globality opens the way to relational, multilayered being.

Within this conceptual frame the notion of creolisation is central: "Creolization is the means by which several distinct cultures, or their elements, come into contact in a particular place in the world." (Glissant & Obrist, 2021, pp. 26–27). For Glissant, interaction among cultures does not dissolve them; it preserves tension between differences, generating new forms that are irreducible to a single scheme. Unlike assimilation, creolisation reveals the potential of difference.

Glissant also stresses how the Western tradition — from Plato to Augustine — often rests on a normative order built on exclusion: "The utopia of the great Western authors implies the search for a norm that is necessarily a norm that excludes, that rejects. For example, Plato, in *The Republic*, rejects poets. He drives the poets out of the city state… That's the normative side of utopia… most often it leads to fatal exclusions." (Glissant & Obrist, 2021, pp. 64–65). Such utopias are fatal for those not included in their universalist design; they build order by suppressing difference.

Glissant repeatedly underscores the radical instability of the present: “The earth is trembling. Systems of thought have been demolished, and there are no more straight paths… Today, the world is unpredictable and in such a world, utopia is necessary. But utopia needs trembling thinking: we cannot discuss utopia with fixed ideas.” (Glissant & Obrist, 2021, p. 139).

Asked what he means by trembling thinking, Glissant replies: “ Firstly, what I call *tremblement* is neither incertitude nor fear. It is not what paralyses us. Trembling thinking is the instinctual feeling that we must refuse all categories of fixed and imperial thought… It is thinking in which we can lose time searching, in which we can wander, and in which we can counter all the systems of terror, domination and imperialism with the poetics of trembling — it allows us to be in real contact with the world and with the peoples of the world. It’s metaphorical, but it’s also real, concrete.” (ibid.) In other words, tremblement names both a poetic stance (metaphor) and the very vibrations of a world shaken by migration, climate shocks and information overload (concrete reality); it is a practice of staying mobile within instability rather than forcing coherence. *Metaphorically*, then, tremblement names a poetics of restlessness that resists every attempt at closure; *concretely*, it registers the literal shocks — ecological, social, informational — that ripple through contemporary life.

At the centre of this logic lies root identity — a model that ties a person to territory and origin. It excludes what lies outside those coordinates: “The people who want to affirm their identity, their root identity, are always killers.” (Glissant & Obrist, 2021, p. 76). As an alternative Glissant invokes the rhizome, re-worked from Deleuze and Guattari: “The single root kills all around it and the rhizome instead spreads to other roots without killing them.” (Glissant & Obrist, 2021, p. 76). In this perspective utopia is not a system but a gesture — a movement toward others that is grounded in the recognition of incompleteness and multiplicity. Glissant’s appeal to a shared, suffering world brings the discussion full circle. At the essay’s outset, the quest for totality appeared as humanity’s age-old attempt to escape finitude by subsuming every difference within a single, all-validating order. Glissant does not abandon that horizon altogether: he re-imagines it as an archipelagic utopia—a “totality” composed of relations, not of uniformity. Instead of one root that kills what surrounds it, his rhizomatic vision gathers a multitude of partial roots in continual exchange. Thus the ancient drive toward totality survives, but only under the sign of incompleteness and multiplicity.

Still, Glissant does not treat utopia as an abstract idea detached from real suffering and global inequality. He speaks of One-World, not as homogeneity but as a shared field of co-presence in which everyone is already involved — each an *elementary particle of the Tout-*

Monde. Utopia thus becomes not a goal but a way of moving: how we travel, with whom, and what we allow along the way — vulnerability, delay, unknowing.(Glissant & Obrist, 2021, p. 71).

1.4 Utopia Amid Polycrisis

The contemporary state of the world is increasingly described through the concept of polycrisis — multiple, interconnected, and mutually reinforcing crises spanning ecological, political, economic, and social spheres. Coined by Edgar Morin in the 1990s to capture "interwoven and cross-conditioned" systemic breakdowns (Morin & Kern, 1999), the term has been revitalised by Adam Tooze, who writes that "we are living through a polycrisis — a situation where multiple crises interact in such a way that the overall impact exceeds the sum of each part" (Tooze, 2022).

In *Utopia in the Age of Survival* S. D. Chrostowska reinterprets utopia as method rather than as a normative model of the future. "Conceptualising utopia as method… presupposes looking at human society as a problem in need of a solution" (Chrostowska, 2021, p. 8). Utopia thereby relinquishes the status of *telos* and becomes a processual category capable of articulating alternatives amid mounting instability.

A central element of this paradigm is desire, understood not as the antithesis of reason but as the driving force of utopian imagination. "The bridge to this new, exploratory conception of utopia was desire and, more specifically, educated desire — desire that has been taught 'to desire, to desire better, to desire more, and above all to desire otherwise'" (Chrostowska, 2021, p. 55). Through desire the critical imagination is activated: the capacity to think beyond existing frameworks even when an alternative future cannot yet be fully articulated.

Yet Chrostowska is equally attentive to the dramatic contraction of political expectation under conditions of cascading risk. In a chapter tellingly titled *The Politics of Bare Survival*, she observes: "*Survival is the struggle for survival*" (2021, p. 89). She sums up the same intuition elsewhere — in the aphorism, "*Survival is the minimal utopia of our time*." When genocides, wars, climate disasters, and financial collapses converge, the very continuity of life is contested, a utopian horizon. Endurance itself is redefined as both a political state and an ethical limitation, exposing the structural inequalities that dictate which lives may be forfeited first.

That stark realism does not rule out hope; rather it demands its transformation. Chrostowska insists on a disillusioned, yet nuanced hope, one that distances itself from the

opposite extremes of naïve optimism and total fatalism: "*Nostalgia's solace gives birth to hope: an uncomplicated, despondent hope without optimism, and no less radical for it*" (2021, p. 36). Such hope retains mobilising power precisely because it is sober, alert to limits, and stripped of the promissory exuberance that often paralyses action when prophecy fails.

The work of hope is sustained by critical imagination, which Chrostowska conceives as an ongoing practice of resistance. "*The nowhere, long projected somewhere, must now extend everywhere*," she writes, converting the concept of utopia from a quarantined island of perfection into a demand that permeates the entire social field (2021, p. 111). In this register, to imagine otherwise is already to oppose the normalising narratives that hold the polycrisis in place; the very act of thought becomes a political gesture.

Thus, as in Édouard Glissant's thought, utopia in Chrostowska's work appears not as a blueprint for the future but as an open-ended practice: "*utopian world-making thus became a heuristic device, an organon, critical and self-reflexive, provisional and open-ended*" (Chrostowska, 2021, p. 8)

In Chrostowska's view, utopian thinking functions in multiple ways. It is a form of everyday resistance born of critical imagination; a desire-fueled drive for transformation; and a sober hope, fully aware of its own limits yet still capable of inspiring action. Finally, when survival itself becomes a political act, utopian thinking emerges as a struggle for the very possibility of life. In this context, utopian thinking assumes the character of historical necessity: it remains the indispensable resource for sustaining the possibility of coexistence under conditions of polycrisis. For both Glissant and Chrostowska, thought is inseparable from the subject's embedded position within the world; any form of "being-together" demands an ethical and epistemological re-examination of how we see, feel, and interpret.

During an interview with *El País* in May 2025, Žižek stated that "We have to be clear that the good old days of liberal social democracy are over. The rules have changed," contending that we have entered an era concerned not with building a better world but with collective survival under a permanent state of emergency (Žižek, 2025, May).

In *Too Late to Awaken* (2024), Žižek turns to Jacques Lacan's reading of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*. He recalls the scene in which a father, dozing beside his son's coffin, unaware of a nearby fire. It was not the smell of smoke that roused the father from his sleep, but rather a dream in which his deceased child cries out, "Father, can't you see that I am burning?" (p. 91). For Lacan, awakening happens from the Real — the element that resists symbolic integration — rather than into empirical reality. Žižek argues that contemporary "woke culture" follows the same logic: it only simulates awakening to social trauma in order

to permit continued slumber. “They awaken us (to the horrors of racism and sexism) precisely to enable us to go on sleeping” (Žižek, 2024, p. 92).

Recognition of injustice thus becomes a ritual in which moral satisfaction substitutes for structural change; the political gesture is reduced to ethical compensation. Woke activism, Žižek contends, frequently functions as decaffeinated protest — a rhetoric of struggle that has been purged of systemic radicalism. Corporations endorse the symbolism of inclusion while remaining embedded in exploitative and ecologically violent structures: “You are not required to change your life… you go on with your career… but you are on the right side” (Žižek, 2024, p. 92).

Žižek links this dynamic to the psychoanalytic superego, which simultaneously demands the impossible and punishes every attempt to comply: “You must strive eternally to understand the experiences of black people / You can never understand… and if you think you do, you are a racist” (Žižek, 2024, p. 87). The resulting ethical trap perpetually intensifies guilt rather than alleviating it.

Within this logic, discussion yields to accusation, argument to the subjective feeling of *harm*, and facts are dismissed as instruments of oppression: “Objective facts are a tool of white supremacy” (Žižek, 2024, p. 89). Even academic settings — Žižek cites Vincent Lloyd’s seminar — become arenas of ritual isolation where the refusal of dialogue is packaged as justice.

Consequently, wokeness does not dismantle the symbolic order; it reinforces it. It permits *seeing* without acting, so that awakening itself becomes a device for sublimating, rather than confronting, anxiety. Instead of facing the Real, we enter a dream in which everything has already been acknowledged, processed, and rendered safe. Žižek therefore calls not for the abandonment of solidarity but for its re-conceptualisation: rather than charity as a benevolent gesture, he calls for struggle as the shared overcoming of structural dependency — within and beyond one’s own culture. This marks a crucial shift from moralising to politics, from recognition to action.

Adam McKay’s film *Don’t Look Up* (2021) has proved strikingly prophetic, becoming a metaphor for contemporary society’s incapacity to respond adequately to catastrophic threats. Not only does the picture record the refusal to act,the way the very acknowledgment of the catastrophe itself can serve to repress it. Disaster is exhibited so that it no longer needs to be lived: it enters cultural circulation, generates an emotional jolt, yet demands no transformation. This is precisely “decaffeinated politics” — an anxious but safe imaginary in which collective awakening merely reproduces the dream of control (Žižek, 2024, p. 92). This logic is also at

work in Hollywood's long-standing fascination with dystopian and revolutionary narratives, particularly in the wave of young adult films from the 2010s such as The Hunger Games or Divergent. These films theatrically stage rebellion and critique authoritarian structures, yet they are paradoxically produced by the very cultural industries and corporate systems they pretend to resist. In doing so, they offer spectators the satisfaction of symbolic resistance without the threat of material change — scratching the revolutionary itch while leaving existing power structures intact.

Although Édouard Glissant, S. D. Chrostowska, and Slavoj Žižek write from different theoretical vantage points, they agree on one thing: the present moment is *emerging* — unstable, mobile, and requiring heightened attentiveness, responsibility, and reflection (Chrostowska, 2021; Glissant & Obrist, 2021; Žižek, 2024).

1.5 Sound as Epistemic Challenge – Why the Sonic Eludes Capture

Having argued in subsection 1.4 that the polycrisis dismantles modernity's confidence in totalising knowledge, we can now observe how sound sharpens this epistemic fracture. Nowhere is the instability of knowledge more evident than in the way Western thought has historically framed the relationship between hearing and seeing. Jonathan Sterne's The Audible Past (2003) offers a precise genealogy of this relationship and shows why sound art so effectively resists conventional modes of documentation.

The history of sound in Western thought, Sterne argues, has never been an innocent report of physical facts; it is saturated with powerful ideological pre-sets. In the opening chapters of The Audible Past he demonstrates that the familiar opposition between hearing and sight is far more than a physiological contrast. It belongs to what he calls the audiovisual litany — a chain of stable oppositions that reaches back to the Christian doctrine of spirit and letter: "The audiovisual litany is ideological in the oldest sense of the word: it is derived from religious dogma" (Sterne 2003, p. 16). Within this schema, hearing aligns with life-giving spirit, while sight is tied to the inert letter: "Spirit and letter have sensory analogues: hearing leads a soul to spirit, sight leads a soul to the letter" (p. 16).

Sterne traces the litany's roots from the Gospel of John and Augustine through Plato's Phaedrus and, in modernity, to Walter Ong. In Orality and Literacy, Ong offers "the most coherent contemporary statement" of the hearing-spirit/sight-letter divide (Sterne, 2003, p. 16). Yet, Sterne notes, scholars cite Ong "usually in ignorance of the connections between his ideas

on sound and his theological writings" (p. 16), allowing the litany to continue structuring debates on perception beneath the surface.

Sterne's aim, then, is not to replace vision with audition but to untangle this ideological knot and open the way to a historically attuned analysis of sound. His point of departure is the period 1750-1925—a span marked not only by the Enlightenment but by what he terms Ensoniment: "As there was an Enlightenment, so too was there an 'Ensoniment'" (Sterne, 2003, p. 2). During these years, sound itself became "an object and a domain of thought and practice," no longer filtered solely through privileged instances such as voice or music (p. 2). Physics and technology—from Descartes to Bernoulli—translated sound into measurable frequencies and vibrations, while the ear was recast as a physiological processor with precise algorithms of reception and reproduction.

This shift, Sterne insists, fractures the habitual nature/culture binary. We "treat sound as a natural phenomenon exterior to people, but its very definition is anthropocentric" (Sterne, 2003, p. 11). A limitless field of vibrations surrounds us, yet they become "sound" only within the bandwidth of human hearing; any attempt to describe a "pure" sound is doomed because "the language that we use to describe sound and hearing comes weighted down with decades or centuries of cultural baggage" (p. 10). Sound is therefore not a brute physical "fact" but a dynamic product of bodies, technologies, and historical practices.

Sound-recording devices occupy a special place in this story. Popular claims that "the telephone changed the way we do business" or "the phonograph changed the way we listen to music" amount, for Sterne, to a form of "technological deification" (2003, p. 7). These machines did not simply "capture" reality: "They were wishes that people grafted onto sound-reproduction technologies—wishes that became programs for innovation and use" (p. 8). The realism of early radio broadcasts or phonograph records was as carefully constructed as the apparatuses themselves, generating "a new form of sonic realism appropriate to the events being represented" (p. 246).

Sterne's critique of the audiovisual litany is therefore not a simple inversion. He invites us to "redescribe sound" without recourse to religious metaphysics: "We do not need to assume that sound draws us into the world while vision separates us from it" (Sterne, 2003, p. 18). If sound is "a little piece of the vibrating world" (p. 11), it is inexorably embedded in "capitalism, cities, industries … a host of other phenomena" (p. 343).

The final thesis of The Audible Past states that writing a history of sound means acknowledging multiple temporalities and the very constructedness of human perception. "The story offered in these pages—of an 'Ensoniment,' a modern organization of sound—promotes

a conception of nature (and human nature) as malleable, as something to be shaped and transformed" (Sterne, 2003, p. 340). Sound thus becomes a key to understanding how culture continually "retunes" bodies and senses, opening fresh horizons for historical action.

If sound itself is historically made, then so is the position of the one who hears it. This historical reframing of sound—now recognised as culturally and technologically produced—clears the path for the psychoanalytic and post-structural perspectives that follow. Once sound is understood as inherently mediated and listeners as co-producers of the sonic field, thinkers such as Lacan, Deleuze, and Guattari can reconceptualize listening itself as a desiring, machinic, and fundamentally active process. In Sterne's terms, the audiovisual litany already casts hearing as the seat of living spirit—an attribution that psychoanalysis will translate into drive and desire.

Sterne's analysis underlines why sound art is the perfect "stress-test" for any epistemology that still dreams of completeness. Because sonic meaning is historically retuned, it is inherently plural, contingent, and incomplete. Addressing such incompleteness requires intellectual instruments that value relation over totality, uncertainty over closure, and participation over authorial mastery.

The following subsection 1.6 therefore assembles a conceptual toolkit — from Blaga's mystery to Glissant's archipelagic relation—that will guide the rest of this thesis and inform the curatorial strategy of the Struer Tracks Almanac.

1.6 Conceptual Toolkit & Curatorial Implications

The itinerary of thinkers reviewed so far traces a clear arc. Classical philosophy—from Plato through Augustine, Kant and Hegel—equated emancipation with the possibility that reason might one day encompass the whole. Twentieth-century thought shatters that certainty: Blaga posits an in-built "transcendental censorship" that blocks any perfect match between mind and world; Lyotard relocates meaning to local language games, while Foucault shows how such games crystallise into dispersed regimes of truth. In their wake, Glissant advances an archipelagic imagination that values relation over unification and proposes "trembling thinking" as an ethics of staying open. Chrostowska reframes utopia as a provisional method powered by desire, whereas Morin and Tooze name the polycrisis as the historical weave of interlocking ecological, geopolitical and economic shocks. Žižek, finally, warns that symbolic dissent can be pacified into what he calls "decaffeinated politics," neutralising resistance while maintaining existing structures.

To this constellation subsection 1.5 has now added Jonathan Sterne's account of the audiovisual litany and of an eighteenth-and-nineteenth-century "Ensoniment." Sterne demonstrates that hearing itself is historically and technologically programmed; what we call "sound" is never a brute vibration but a culturally tuned construct. Sonic experience therefore exemplifies the impossibility of total capture: each act of listening is partial, situated and contested. His analysis makes audible—quite literally—the limits that the earlier philosophers diagnosed in the abstract.

Taken together, these perspectives supply the conceptual toolkit for the pages that follow. Mystery and censorship remind us that knowledge is structurally incomplete; language games and regimes of truth expose the micro-politics of meaning; archipelagic relation and trembling thinking defend plurality without collapse; utopia as method keeps desire alive amid the polycrisis; Žižek's critique guards against the easy absorption of critique; and Sterne's sonic elusiveness tests every claim to epistemic closure.

Within such a horizon, the curator can no longer play the sovereign synthesiser of truths. Curatorial practice becomes the art of facilitating encounters inside constitutive incompleteness — holding together incompatible epistemologies long enough for new relations to spark. The next chapter therefore asks how curators have adapted to this task: beginning with Harald Szeemann's auteur model and moving through the rise of relational and post-authorial approaches, it traces the profession's shift from caretaker of objects to co-producer of situations, setting the stage for the later analysis of biennials, Struer Tracks and the Almanac.

Chapter 2 Curating After the Shift: From Authorial to Relational

Chapter 1 showed that knowledge now appears as a field of partial, shifting relations rather than a single organising viewpoint. Curators must work within this condition: their task is no longer to deliver an all-embracing interpretation, but to devise situations in which multiple perspectives can meet without being forced into consensus. The present chapter asks how that expectation emerged.

It begins with Harald Szeemann's *Documenta 5* (1972), the exhibition that famously cast the curator as an independent author whose display could itself be read as a work. From there the narrative follows two intertwined developments. First comes the rapid globalisation of the biennial, a format that drew new publics and geographies into the contemporary-art conversation and obliged curators to negotiate divergent cultural contexts. Second is the rise of distributed attention in the digital era, where exhibitions circulate as widely through online images, reviews and discussion threads as through the gallery spaces in which they are first installed. Together these shifts loosened the grip of the single curatorial voice and opened the way for more collaborative and networked approaches.

The chapter closes by looking at recent proposals for *archipelagic* or relational curating—approaches that treat an exhibition less as a unified statement than as a temporary constellation held together only for the duration of its encounter. By tracing this trajectory, Chapter 2 provides the institutional background for the rest of the thesis. It explains why a print-based, collective publication such as the Struer Tracks Almanac can legitimately function as part of a broader curatorial strategy, and it prepares the ground for Chapter 3, which turns to the specific challenge of writing about sound.

2.1 Szeemann & the Authorial Turn

In his book *Thinking Contemporary Curating* art historian Terry Smith challenges the common belief that the finest artworks of any era are determined "naturally," without mediation, and therefore justly assessed (Smith, 2012). Smith illustrates this point with Phaidon's Cream catalogues, each of which singles out one hundred "leading" contemporary artists. He notes that "The one hundred artists whose works are illustrated in each volume are chosen by ten curators — the emergent curators of contemporary art at the time — not by art critics, theorists, or historians" (Smith, 2012, p. 182).

According to Smith, the publisher implies that whatever these curators select

automatically represents the cutting edge: “Curators are, after all, closest to art’s production, to artists, its producers. This is the least mediated access you can get” (Smith, 2012, p. 182) .

Such extensive — and, in Smith’s view, potentially hazardous — influence obliges us to scrutinise the assumptions behind every curatorial choice of works, names, or themes. Importantly, this influence is not sudden; it results from historical and institutional processes that have shifted the curator’s role from mediator to author, one who frames both the context and the language of artistic statements.
To analyse this phenomenon, Chapter 2 will first trace how the idea of curatorial practice has evolved over time. Later, in Chapter 4, the biennial format and its transformations in recent decades will be examined. Collectively, these steps provide the groundwork for a close reading of the Struer Tracks festival.

With the expansion of curatorial work, the very meaning of curating has shifted. In *Ways of Curating*, Hans Ulrich Obrist notes that the term has shifted in meaning over recent decades, moving “from a person (a curator) to an enterprise (curating).” This redirects attention from a fixed professional role toward the process of selecting and organising itself (Obrist, 2014, p. 27). The change is driven less by an institutional crisis and more by the torrent of cultural flows in which “the proliferation and reproduction of ideas, raw data, processed information, images, disciplinary knowledge and material products” renders sheer production redundant; significance now lies in drawing connections among fragments (Obrist, 2014, p.27). Hence curating increasingly embodies “the contemporary idea of the creative self,” articulating individuality through choice rather than authorship (Obrist, 2014, p.27).

Yet Obrist warns that an overly elastic use of curating may cheapen the concept: “this contemporary resonance… risks producing a kind of bubble in the value attached to the idea of curating” (Obrist, 2014, p.27). Remembering the word’s Latin root — curare, “to take care of” — he stresses that curating carries ethical and historical responsibility: “the activities it combines into one role… are still well expressed by the meaning of its Latin etymological root, curare: to take care of” (Obrist, 2014, p. 28). The same care dictates his description of curating as “cultivating, growing, pruning and trying to help people and their shared contexts to thrive” (Obrist, 2014, p. 28).

Professionally, four interlocking functions have crystallised: preservation of cultural heritage, selection of new work, contributing to art history, and displaying & arranging art (Obrist, 2014, p. 29).

Over time the last function has become dominant, prompting Obrist to remark that “a neologism is needed, so completely has the curator-as-Ausstellungsmacher, or ‘exhibition-

maker', departed from the traditional role of caretaking" (Obrist, 2014, p. 29).

Exhibitions themselves are comparatively young, having been a rare occurrence prior to the nineteenth century. Nowadays, they have become everyday experiences for millions. "Exhibitions themselves are a new form… a practice that became prominent only in the last 250 years" (Obrist, 2014, p.29). Contemporary curating, then, is a recent historical product that nonetheless carries an ancient mandate of care, selection, and interpretation.

The re-evaluation of the curator's role began in the late 1960s, when independent exhibition practices gave way to the figure of the independent curator. The shift reached its most notable peak with *documenta 5* (1972) under Harald Szeemann, which marked the transition from the curator-administrator to a cultural producer with an authorial voice. As Panos Kompatsiaris observes, Szeemann embodied a new type — "an autonomous and creative producer of culture, who organised exhibitions independently of institutions" (Richter, 2013, as cited in Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 48). Szeemann's appearance among artists and spectators on the show's final day visually signalled the advent of the authorial curator.

From that moment, curating ceased to be a secondary function. Within the flexible, globally visible biennial format, the curator could do more than simply organise projects; they could also "make sense of things" by structuring knowledge, setting agendas, and redirecting the art world's attention (Balzer, 2014, as cited in Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 47). This new power can be understood through Bourdieu's notion of doxa — a durable and seemingly self-evident set of assumptions that enables the curator to decide what counts as art and the discursive key in which it should be presented (Bourdieu, 1977, as cited in Kompatsiaris, 2017).

In *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* Paul O'Neill describes the profession's evolution through Raymond Williams's categories of residual, emergent, and dominant (O'Neill, 2012, p. 25) . The residual layer is linked to the demystifying strategies of the 1960s and the critique of closed institutions, the emergent becomes visible with the boom of curatorial texts, catalogues, and symposia in the 1980s-1990s, and the dominant arrives with the full professionalisation and globalisation of the field, a moment that, as O'Neill notes, "created a market for a nomadic type of global curator" (O'Neill, 2012, p. 46) . At the same time, the figure of the curator morphs away from that of an editor or DJ to, as he quips, "the more absurd diviner, fairy godmother, and even god" (O'Neill, 2012, p. 47) . Echoing this shift, Catherine de Zegher recalls that "The key shift is that curatorial practice has become professionalised. It used to be amateur in a way… We closely lived that transition" (Catherine de Zegher, 2005, as cited in O'Neill, 2012, p. 45) .

The re-appraisal of curatorial work began in the late 1960s; by 1989 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh was already insisting that the curatorial viewpoint be folded into art discourse, recording the passage of the "exhibition service" into a field of language: "The curator observes his/her operation within the institutional apparatus of art … its transformation from practice to discourse" (Buchloh, 1989, p. 142).

By the end of the 1990s, as Terry Smith noted, the curator was evolving from an institutional functionary into an intellectual agent of knowledge production. Hans Ulrich Obrist's *A Brief History of Curating*, for example, is "an attempt to give voice to a number of revolutionary curators… and to embed their voices in the collective memory of curating" (Obrist, 2008, p. 9), making curators the authors of their own history rather than objects of analysis. As Benjamin Buchloh observed as early as 1989, curatorial work was migrating "from practice to discourse," with the curator's primary labor performed through framing and interpretation rather than merely assembling objects (Buchloh, 1989, as cited in O'Neill, 2012, p. 42-43). Paul O'Neill (2012) echoes this point, noting that by the late 1990s curators had become dynamic cultural producers — "mediator, producer, interface, and neo-critic" (Gillick, 2000, as cited in O'Neill, 2012, p. 43) — a shift that displaced the art critic's former authority and installed the curator in an authorial position.

The consolidation of curating as a profession rests on an ever-thickening infrastructure of master's programmes, international symposia, and specialist periodicals such as *The Exhibitionist*, *On Curating* and the *Journal of Curatorial Studies*. As early as two decades ago, Bruce Ferguson had already warned that the catalogue had become "the most 'privileged fetish of curators'" (Ferguson, 1996, p. 178, as cited in O'Neill, 2012, p. 44), highlighting how textual surrogates can overshadow the immediate aesthetic experience. More than mere indicators, the online and print platforms of today serve as engines of institutional legitimacy: the editors of *The Exhibitionist* framed their journal as a curatorial analogue to *Cahiers du Cinéma*, proclaiming "a shared belief in the idea of the author, which applies to exhibition making just as much as it does to filmmaking" (Hoffmann et al., 2010, as cited in Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 49)

By the early 2000s,curating had consolidated itself as a hybrid cultural-cognitive practice. To curate is not simply to display objects, but to set frameworks of meaning while drawing on the ramified institutional infrastructure and the symbolic power that Pierre Bourdieu theorised as doxa (Bourdieu, 1977, as cited in Kompatsiaris, 2017).

Tension was already present at the very birth of author-driven curatorship. At documenta 5 — the exhibition that installed Harald Szeemann as the paradigmatic "authorial

curator" — artists Robert Smithson and Daniel Buren rebuked him for staging, in Buren's words, "an exhibition of the exhibition as a work of art and no longer an exhibition of works of art" (Buren, 1972, quoted in von Bismarck, 2017, as cited in Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 51). The mediator had turned into a rival who claimed the power to set the very context within which artworks would be read.

As curatorial authority hardened into professional doxa, internal critique intensified. In her essay "The Curatorial," Maria Lind contrasts the technical labour of curating with *the curatorial* — a flexible process that "creates situations that encourage exchange, knowledge, and social sensitivity" (Lind, 2009, para. 2). The emphasis thus shifts from rigid authorship to open non-hierarchical participation.

By the 2010s, the pendulum had swung notably in the opposite direction. Star curators began to question their own status, with Hans Ulrich Obrist insisting: "I have never thought of the curator as a creative rival to the artist… I think of my work as that of a catalyst – and sparring partner" (Obrist, 2014). The field moved toward relational and delegated models in which the artist's voice once again comes first, while the emblem of the "star-curator" continued to increasingly provoke scepticism. The mainstream ideal became the "good" curator, the one who provides space and refuses to claim sole authorship.

Consequently, the curatorial field today remains hybrid and perpetually re-defined, an amalgamation of the functions of critic, manager, theorist, and artist. It is sustained by texts, public visibility, and global mobility, yet it also risks self-aggrandisement and a loss of critical distance. As Paul O'Neill observes, contemporary practice operates within "a market for a nomadic type of global curator" (O'Neill, 2012, p. 46) and should be understood as "a durational, transformative, and speculative activity… keeping things in flow, mobile, in between" (O'Neill, 2012, p. 89) – not merely a profession, but a form of cultural and discursive production whose internal contradictions remain productive.

2.2 Transnational Transitions & Institutional Critique

The institutionalisation of curatorial work — and, above all, its recalibration as a nomadic global "resource" — has brought undeniable professional expansion, yet it has also exposed the cultural asymmetries that still structure the art world. Inevitably the old centre-versus-periphery question returns: What does the periphery "pay" for admission to the global circuit? Who gains the right to represent and interpret? Which identities are deemed admissible?

Terry Smith places these questions at the core of *Talking Contemporary Curating*. In each dialogue, he insists that curators have had to rethink the centre–periphery axis over the last decade; arguing that the most decisive shift has been an "adjacency of difference, or *intense proximity*, [that] prevails as the most definitive contemporary experience" (Smith, 2015, p.85). In *Thinking Contemporary Curating,* Smith frames the proliferation of regional initiatives not as belated copies of Euro-American modernity but as "transnational transitions" (Smith, 2012, p. 108) — the art world's largest unfinished movement.

Zdenka Badovinac reminds us that centre-periphery relations were already knotted in the modern era and have only become more complex. The task, she says in conversation with Smith, is not to replace the centre with an "authentic" margin but to make the power dynamic itself visible and contested. Okwui Enwezor extends this point: while many Western artists now work "after history," their non-Western peers must still break through the prisms of race and ethnicity. Western artists "are not concerned with identity because they know who they are — they are Europeans". A global art history that excludes such voices, Enwezor insists, is simply untenable.

Maria Lind frames the argument around the context of the metropolis. She notes that major cities such as London, Berlin, and New York have become estranged not only from "the rest of the world" but from their own periphery. During Lind's tenure at Tensta konsthall (2011–2018), a migrant-majority suburb of Stockholm, she began asking local residents about their idea of a truly beneficial cultural centre; the answers she collected ultimately turned the kunsthalle into a contact zone of meetings, homework clubs, and parent cafés. In her essay, *Situating the Curatorial* she calls this "living *in-between* places and times," where the curator operates less as author and more as mediator, weaving "inquiry and gesture," "pertinence and entertainment," "uniqueness and routine" (Lind, 2021, paras. 17–18). Such work, she argues, embodies a form of *weak resistance* — persistent, everyday, low-volume, yet capable of long-term social change.

The same tension surfaces in biennial culture. As Paul O'Neill demonstrates, the biennial curator's role has gone from Williams's *residual* moment of 1960s demystification, through an *emergent* boom of catalogues and symposia in the 1980s–1990s, to a *dominant* phase in which a "market for a nomadic type of global curator" has solidified. At this dominant stage, curators risk losing critical distance precisely because of their institutional power. O'Neill warns that curatorial authorship may lead to "displacement of the artist's voice in the exhibition format," proposing instead "a collective, cumulative form of authorship" (O'Neill, 2012, pp. 76, 125).

In short, the current discourse on globalisation prods curators to rethink power from both an internal institutional context and across a wider yet uneven global terrain. There is an Increasing shift from singular authorship to mediative, situational, and relational models. The imperative within these newer models becomes making the Other visible by constructing arenas in which multiple voices can unfold on their own terms, forgoing the practice of appropriation.

While curating was still perceived as a domain of freedom, critique, and self-reflection at the beginning of the 21st century, recent decades have seen become ever more tightly woven into the global economy of signs. This ambivalent position — suspended between critical intent and institutional embedment — is formulated with unusual clarity by Nicolas Bourriaud in *Notes on Globalisation*, *National Identities, and the Production of Signs* (2009). Developing Jean-François Lyotard's thesis of the "post-industrial condition," Bourriaud argues that today "supreme value is information created, stored, accessed, processed, and transmitted in digital form" (Bourriaud, 2009, p. 101); affirming that information itself has become the universal currency.

He further adds that contemporary art has fully absorbed this informational-market logic: "The growing globalisation of the art world... reflects a veritable revolution in contemporary culture" (p. 15). After the fall of the Berlin Wall, culture entered a phase of accelerated standardisation in which "Standardisation of economic and financial structures does not lead to a diversity of forms…" (p. 101). Difference is turned into a fungible sign, while the supposedly "diverse world" of art merely serves those unified infrastructures.

Bourriaud criticises multiculturalism as "a diffuse ideology" that is in reality masking Western hegemony: "Multiculturalism... comes across as an ideology of the domination of the West's universal language…" (p. 104). The non-Western artist is therefore expected to display identity "as though worn like an indelible tattoo" (p. 104). Difference is valued only insofar as it is convertible into the idiom of the global art market — a concept which he refers to as the reification of cultural specificity.

Shifting his focus, Bourriaud recasts the contemporary artist as an editor who operates in post-production: "Everything is already there; the artist merely weaves signs between them" (p. 106). Creation is reduced to reorganising extant objects and texts, while the viewer becomes an "occupant of culture," a realm that "can be occupied like a rented apartment" (p. 107). Art is no longer a space for "authentic self-expression" but a field in which signs are reallocated within the unified code of global production: "The emergence of contemporary art... reflects a given country's level of cooperation with the process of economic globalisation" (p. 105).

As an alternative to the static model of multiculturalism, Bourriaud proposes interculturalism — a dynamic engagement with alterity, suggesting that art should intervene in the flow of representations, thereby restructuring their circuitry and meanings. The dilemma that results confronts the curator as acutely as the artist: each is torn between sustaining fragile, relational forms of resistance and the pressure of a global system eager to brand every difference.

Simon Sheikh extends Bourriaud's diagnosis, arguing that contemporary art has become embedded in "a cultural logic of neoliberal globalization" and in the wider "financialisation of all aspects of human existence" (Sheikh, 2021, p. 2). It speaks the language of diversity, cosmopolitanism, and inclusion while relying on the very economic and political structures that entrench global inequality. Tracing developments that followed the collapse of the socialist bloc, Sheikh evokes the age of TINA (There Is No Alternative) and the politics of the Extreme Centre (Ali, 2015). Within this framework art institutions adopted "a realist approach to capital" (Sheikh, 2021, p. 3).

The ensuing boom of biennials, art fairs, and global infrastructures was enabled by neoliberal hegemony: "...The political success and hegemony of neoliberal globalization since the 1990s enabled the art world to expand and become world-conquering" (p. 2). Drawing on Nancy Fraser, Sheikh shows that neoliberalism achieved hegemony by fusing the rhetoric of cultural recognition with the maintenance of economic inequality — a formation Fraser calls progressive neoliberalism. Art became the latter's aesthetic façade: it "talks the talk of liberation and emancipation while walking the walk of financialization" (p. 3).

As the post-2008 world order fractured, the art field exposed its own fragility. Outwardly progressive, it was increasingly perceived as an elitist apparatus — "contemporary art … is also structurally always already inclusive and elitist simultaneously" (Sheikh, 2021, p. 3) .

Drawing on Pankaj Mishra's idea of *ressentiment*, Sheikh traces a transnational backlash that coalesces into "a truly global political and cultural movement of … ressentiment" (p. 4) , casting contemporary art as a proxy for what Gayatri Spivak once called "the financialization of the globe" (p. 2) . Under such conditions, resistance can no longer depend on novelty or shock; instead, it appears wherever artists "contest globalization, sometimes with the insistence on local sedimentation and community building as opposed to … internationalist biennials" (p. 2) .

This turn toward the slow, the local and the bodily is not merely aesthetic. It gestures toward exodus: de-westernisation, Sheikh notes, "may … indicate a withdrawal from the circuit

of contemporary art" (p. 8) . Radicality, in other words, is a conscious refusal to be folded back into the circuits of capital — a politico-ontological stance that inhabits the very *roads of rage and ruin* between the world that has collapsed and the one that might still emerge.

2.3 OS XXI, Distributed Attention & Networked Audiences

In the writings of Bourriaud and Sheikh, the chief danger is the conversion of every cultural "difference" into a token for the global marketplace. Claire Bishop shows what follows once this commodification is complete: artistic energy is absorbed by an ever-thickening cloud of signals in which artworks compete less with each other and more with a bottomless feed of mediated messages. She names this phenomenon "OS XXI, the operating system of spectatorship in the twenty-first century" (Bishop, 2024, p. 46) .

Within what Claire Bishop terms OS XXI—shorthand for "Operating System Twenty-One", her diagnosis of twenty-first-century spectatorship—viewers no longer resemble the modernist ideal of rapt absorption. Literacy, she argues, has mutated into "skimming and sampling", a mode of reading and looking geared towards gleaning gist under data pressure (Bishop, 2024, p. 73). Bishop develops the concept through case-studies of recent performance exhibitions, notably *Sun & Sea (Marina)*, the Lithuanian Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale (2019), where visitors wandered across a mezzanine beach, filming, chatting and scrolling while an eco-opera unfolded below. Such shows assume that attention will be "radically dispersed… The work is less self-important, less total; it grants us the space to be mobile and social, to react, chat, share, and archive as we watch" (Bishop, 2024, pp. 9–10). Installation design now actively anticipates oscillation between bodily presence and screen-mediated exchange: "I wonder if I can ask the curator for a link to stream the video at home. I take installation shots… I respond to my partner's texts about childcare" (Bishop, 2024, p. 13). Artists and curators, in other words, treat fragmented attention not as an obstacle but as the structural given of OS XXI.

Bishop's theoretical move is to reject the morality tale of deep attention versus distraction. "Attention is not a volitional state… but is a collective phenomenon" (Bishop, 2024, p. 44), generated by the entanglement of bodies, technologies, and situations. As a result of this entanglement, technology cannot be treated as an outside force: "we are entwined with our technological objects as prostheses" (Bishop, 2024, p. 44).

Collectively, these insights shift the critical task from reclaiming attention through nostalgia for "deep focus", to mapping zones where artistic agency emerges inside OS XXI —

through duration, looping, viral diffusion, or deliberate incompatibility with frictionless circulation.

2.4 Archipelagic & Relational Curating Today

The trajectory traced in this chapter places contemporary curating within what Édouard Glissant calls the "right to opacity", an archipelagic ethic that allows heterogeneous positions to stand side by side without being pressed into a single storyline (Glissant, 1997; Glissant & Obrist, 2021). From Szeemann's auteur model through the relational experiments described by Maria Lind to Paul O'Neill's notion of cumulative authorship, the curator has moved from unifying narrator to host, tending a constellation of temporary "islands" across the biennial field (Obrist, 2014; O'Neill, 2012). Yet those islands drift inside what Nicolas Bourriaud termed a global economy of signs, where diversity can be monetised, and within the progressive-neoliberal framework analysed by Simon Sheikh, which recycles inclusive rhetoric while often deepening inequality (Bourriaud, 2009; Sheikh, 2021). The practical task is therefore not merely to display difference, but to design contact zones where conflicting value systems — environmental justice and extractivism, redistribution and austerity — can be laid bare and debated.

The dispersed attention mapped by Claire Bishop's analysis of *OS XXI* exacerbates this challenge: spectatorship now drifts across screens, social media feeds and multiple event sites, making durable, porous formats more helpful than attempts to restore a single centre of focus (Bishop, 2024). Curating thus becomes a modest exercise in what Glissant calls "trembling thinking": open in authorship, entangled in financialised flows, and choreographed for decentralised perception.

These pressures extend beyond exhibitions to the ways knowledge is written, archived and shared — particularly around sound, a medium that travels easily yet resists stable description. At this point the proposed Almanac appears. It is not an extension of the Struer Tracks programme, nor a conventional catalogue, but a parallel platform in which artists, listeners and researchers can reflect — through text — on *kommunal praksis*, the ways communities are carried, unsettled and recomposed through sonic experience. While the biennial convenes spaces of listening, the Almanac provides an equally provisional space of writing, offering room for voices that might remain peripheral in an event-centred economy.

Chapter 3 therefore turns from exhibition making to the epistemological question of how sound can be thought and written. Because listening is fleeting and relational, any textual

account is partial; yet critically informed writing remains essential for understanding how listening practices sustain the communal forms gathered under *kommunal praksis*. The Almanac will serve as a test site for this "writing-with-sound". Chapter 4 will then return to the biennial itself, examining how Struer Tracks and the Almanac together translate these sonic insights into a festival architecture that fosters—rather than simply represents — collective acts of care, negotiation and belonging.

Chapter 3: Writing the Unwriteable: Textual Strategies for Sound Art

Curating in a poly-crisis climate, as Chapter 2 demonstrated, has shifted from arranging objects to hosting provisional encounters. Sound art intensifies that shift. Because a sonic work vanishes as soon as it is heard, any attempt to document or analyze it must contend with its inherent ephemerality. This chapter therefore pursues three linked aims. First, it retraces the historical and philosophical roots of what we might call "sonic doubt" — the idea that listening eliminates the critical distance that conventional analysis typically relies on. Secondly, it considers how contemporary institutions, from museums to biennials, are re-tooling their archival habits to accommodate sonic ephemerality. Finally, it introduces the Struer Tracks Almanac as a curatorial-textual strategy that extends, rather than fixes, the experience of listening, keeping the conversation open once the last vibration has faded.

With this agenda in view, the discussion opens by uncovering the cultural conditions that make sonic doubt possible.

3.1 Historical Grounds for Sonic Doubt

In *Listening and Voice*, Ihde (2007) critiques the dominance of visualism in Western philosophy, arguing that it has led to an undervaluation of auditory experience. He asserts that while vision has historically been associated with objectivity and knowledge, listening is an immersive and phenomenological process that resists detached observation. Ihde explains that philosophy and science have long prioritised sight as the primary mode of understanding, reinforcing the belief that seeing provides clarity and certainty. However, this preference for vision has led to a relative neglect of other sensory experiences, particularly listening. He warns that this overemphasis on sight limits our engagement with the world, as it conditions us to privilege visual information while overlooking the depth and complexity of auditory perception. As Ihde explains, while sight may offer "clarity" and "rationality," it can also cause "inattentiveness" to the full richness of experience, including the equally profound world of sound (Ihde, 2007, p. 8).

Building on the theme of visual and auditory, In *Listening to Noise and Silence*, Voegelin (2010) asserts that "we often translate sound into something visual — an orchestra, a score, or a sound installation — and thus 'the sound itself is long gone, chased away by the certainty of the image'" (p. xii). She elaborates that "seeing is believing," emphasising our trust in objectivity when confronted with a score, a film's image track, a stage set, or an editing

interface. Yet, by relying on the visual, we risk overlooking the very essence of sound — and the uncertainty it elicits (Voegelin, 2010, p. xii).

According to Voegelin (2010), visual art gains its "certainty" through its materiality and the physical distance between the viewer and the artwork (p. xii). She argues that the belief in "true" comprehension reflects a meta-position toward the work. On the other hand, sustaining such distance is far more difficult in the realm of sound art: the perceiver and the artwork are directly intertwined, rendering the process of perception fundamentally different:

> "By contrast, hearing is full of doubt: phenomenological doubt of the listener about the heard and himself hearing it. Hearing does not offer a meta-position; there is no place where I am not simultaneous with the heard. However far its source, the sound sits in my ear. I cannot hear it if I am not immersed in its auditory object, which is not its source but sound as sound itself" (p. xii).

On this basis, Voegelin (2010) concludes that any study of this experience must remain inseparable from the act of listening: "Consequently, a philosophy of sound art must have at its core the principle of sharing time and space with the object or event under consideration" (Voegelin , 2010, p. xii).

This insistence on "sharing time and space" underscores that engaging with sound is an embodied, present-tense encounter — one that blurs the line between artwork and listener.

To highlight how doubt manifests itself differently in sound art and in visual art, Voegelin (2010) references Maurice Merleau-Ponty's 1948 lecture *The Development of Ideas* (originally broadcast as part of *The French Culture Hour*), along with his 1945 essay *Cézanne's Doubt*. As Voegelin (2010) explains, Merleau-Ponty examines the painter's approach to perception and its inherent uncertainties. According to Voegelin's reading, Merleau-Ponty suggests that modernism was largely a struggle against a single fixed viewpoint; by analyzing Cézanne's works, he shows how the artist sought to recapture the lived experience of seeing, often creating "broken" perspectives (as cited in Voegelin, 2010, p. 6). She analyzes Merleau-Ponty's description:

> "The lazy viewer will see 'errors of perspective' here, while those who look closely will get the feel of a world in which no two objects are seen simultaneously, a world in which regions of space are separated by the time it takes to move our gaze from one to the other, a world in which being is not given but rather emerges over time…" (as cited in Voegelin, 2010, p. 6).

Thus, as Voegelin (2010) interprets Merleau-Ponty, Cézanne's rejection of strict linear perspective and academic clarity embodies his desire to capture the precise instant the world comes into being — a moment the attentive viewer can perceive and feel. Voegelin summarises Merleau-Ponty's argument as follows: "Cézanne wanted to make the world speak for itself, beyond all the interpretations we impose upon it" (Ponty as cited in Voegelin, 2010, p. 7).

Voegelin (2010) notes that the "doubt" Merleau-Ponty observes in Cézanne's work differs from the doubt experienced by an audience of sound art. Reflecting on her own encounter with a Cézanne painting, she writes:

> "I empathise intellectually but not physically. This is not my doubt being worked through here. It remains the painter's. The multi-layered complexity becomes again one viewpoint in the perspective of the gallery. In the certainty of the museum's context, I understand rather than experience doubt" (p. 7).

In other words, as Voegelin (2010) explains, while Cézanne's fractured perspectives prompt the viewer to question conventional ways of seeing, the viewer can still step back — both physically and mentally — and adopt a position of relative detachment. In a gallery or museum, one can observe and analyze a painting without becoming entirely immersed in it. In contrast, a listener experiencing sound art cannot so easily maintain this degree of distance; sound envelops the listener, merging with the act of hearing itself.

In the context of sound art, the listener is not a passive observer or a mere "receiver" of sound. Their role is far more active and complex: listeners help construct the sonic event through their presence, movement, and perceptual engagement. To understand the listener's active role, we must first consider how auditory perception is shaped by psychological processes.

Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic ideas offer insight into this active nature of auditory perception. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan (1978) introduces the concept of the "invocatory drive," emphasising listening as profoundly intertwined with unconscious desires. He highlights the ear's unique openness as an erogenous zone: "the invocatory drive [...] is the closest to the experience of the unconscious," noting that unlike the eye, "the ear [...] has no lids" (p. 104). Thus, for Lacan, the ear actively shapes perception, reflecting psychological structures rather than merely funneling acoustic vibrations into consciousness.

This active perceptual engagement resonates with Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze's (1983) concept of the desiring-machine. According to Deleuze and Guattari, desire is a productive and continuous creative process. They describe the desiring-machine as an assemblage constantly "in process" or becoming (Guattari and Deleuze, 1983, pp. 1–2). Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the desiring-machine, the concept of the listener as part of a listening machine can be similarly understood as an active generative assemblage. Each component within this listening machine — the listener, acoustic space, sound sources, and even recording devices — becomes interconnected, collectively co-producing auditory experiences. Sound does not exist in isolation but arises through interactions between external vibrations and perceptual mechanisms. The ear, therefore, actively selects, emphasises, or even generates auditory experiences, thereby co-producing the sonic event alongside the listener.

Salomé Voegelin (2010) expands on this interactive dimension, asserting that listening inevitably involves generating one's own sounds. She writes:

> "The sounds of his footsteps are part of the auditory city he produces in his movements through it. His subject position is different from the viewing self, whose body is at a distance from the seen. … The listener is entwined with the heard. His sense of the world and of himself is constituted in this bond" (p. 5).

Here, Voegelin emphasizes listening as an interactive, embodied practice, where walking through a city simultaneously perceives and contributes to the urban soundscape. Unlike participants of visual experiences, listeners cannot distance themselves from sound, as listener and sound are phenomenologically intertwined.

Voegelin (2014) further expands on this interactive perspective with her concept of sonic imagination, emphasising sound's creative potential:

> "Sound enables an engagement with the world that is fluid, ephemeral, and contingent, challenging the fixed structures of visual and textual representation. It is in listening that the world is continuously reshaped and reimagined" (p. 61).

Listening thus becomes an imaginative and generative act, one that invites listeners to conceptualise multiple "possible worlds." It is not merely passive reception, it is ongoing participation in the sonic environment. We cannot listen without influencing sound, and we cannot make sound without becoming involved in hearing. In sound art, the listener is

inseparable from the artwork itself. They are collectively part of the “listening machine,” continuously generating new levels of sound through engagement.

Don Ihde’s phenomenology complements Voegelin’s view by describing the auditory experience as a mode of "co-presence." Ihde (2007) argues that listeners exist within a sonic environment rather than merely acting as external observers. He states, "In our familiar immersion in a sound world, we live with sounds that pass for the most part unnoticed, as the iceberg that passes mostly submerged" (p. 221). Unlike vision, which maintains subject-object separation, sound envelops the listener, making perception inherently participatory. This aligns closely with Voegelin’s notion that listening is active and generative, continuously reshaping the auditory world.

For Ihde, listening is dynamic and relational. "The auditory field, continuous and full, penetrating in its presence, is also lively. Sounds 'move' in the rhythms of auditory presence" (Ihde, 2007, p. 82). This dynamism underscores sound’s interactive nature, shifting with listener attention and spatial orientation. Ihde’s framing emphasises sound as an event co-constituted by listener of sound and its source.

Jean-Luc Nancy (2007) further deepens this concept by exploring the ontology of sound itself. In *Listening (À l’écoute)*, Nancy describes sound as resonance — sound does not merely emanate from a source but rather it expands, creating a space in which listener and sound are entangled. Nancy argues:

> “To listen is to be straining toward a possible meaning, and consequently one that is not immediately accessible. It is to be on the edge of meaning, where sound still resounds before signifying” (p. 14).

Nancy portrays listening as both anticipatory and participatory: we catch sound in the act of becoming meaningful. This echoes Martin Heidegger’s concept of *Ereignis* ("event"): sound emerges as meaning over time, continually reshaped rather than fixed.

In contrast, Christoph Cox (2011) proposes a different approach — a materialist viewpoint — asserting that sound exists independently from perception. Cox views sound as "an unfolding of materiality itself, an expression of the real that exists independently of human perception" (p. 148). Sound, as matter vibrating with inherent energy, exists regardless of listeners. Thus, Heidegger’s concept of the event acquires another layer: it is not merely for listeners but a fundamental process of material becoming.

Combined, these perspectives reveal that sound art's defining challenge lies in its dual status as both material and experiential, coupled with its inherently time-based unfolding. Phenomenological thinkers (Lacan, Ihde, Nancy, Voegelin) remind us that sound's non-visual character and reliance on a listening subject create a co-creative relational dynamic; the act of hearing merges listener and sound in real time, resisting any simple, detached observation. Meanwhile, Cox emphasises that sound possesses its own material reality, independent of human perception. Yet it is precisely because sound vanishes the instant it is perceived, that it remains elusive to traditional modes of documentation, which lean heavily on the visual and the static.

These joint perspectives make one point clear: documentation of sound art can never be more than provisional. Any record must be aware, first, of its own technical limits and, second, of the ideological programmes embedded in the very devices and display systems it employs. With those caveats in mind, we can now turn from the phenomenology of listening to the institutional sphere, observing how museums and biennials — traditionally devoted to objects — are learning to work with a medium that refuses to be contained.

3.2 Institutional Flow: From Archive to Event

Reflecting on changes in art, Boris Groys (2016) speaks of performativity as an important feature of contemporary art institutions. He suggests that the museums of today are no longer merely static repositories of permanent collections, theyInstead function as platforms for continuous streams of exhibitions, performances, lectures, screenings, and similar events. According to Groys, contemporary museums have become stages for "temporary curatorial projects — temporary Gesamtkunstwerken" (Groys, 2016, p. 18). The main goal of these projects, as he explains, is "to bring the art museum into the flow – to make art fluid, to synchronise it with the flow of time" (Groys, 2016, p. 18). Today, the museum is no longer a site of contemplation, it is a "place where things happen" (Groys, 2016, p. 18)

This shift gives modern (contemporary) museums an inherent characteristic of temporal irreversibility. Groys notes that "the flow of events inside the museum is today often faster than the flow outside its walls," with curatorial projects, lectures, screenings, and performances transforming museums from static collections into dynamic platforms (Groys, 2016, p. 19). He further argues that museums have become deeply embedded in digital culture: "We follow

a museum's activities on the Internet more often than we visit the museum. On the Internet, the museum functions as a blog" (Groys, 2016, p. 19).

Groys (2016) emphasises that exhibitions today are recognised as ephemeral experiences that leave behind only documentation, such as catalogs, films, or websites — none of which fully capture the experience of direct presence. In the gap between the live event and its documentation, he identifies a peculiar nostalgia — a longing for the unrecoverable experience "as it truly was" (Groys, 2016, p. 21). He likens this to Romantic-era nostalgia for nature found in nineteenth-century landscape painting, in which artists attempted to capture a unity with nature that had already been lost. Similarly, contemporary art's extensive documentation provokes a sense of loss, the feeling that the real event has slipped away, leaving us chasing its echo in photographs, videos, or text (Groys, 2016, p. 21).

Jean Baudrillard presents similar reflections in *Simulacra and Simulation*, where he describes the simulacrum as a system in which the copy begins to not just supplement the original, but also replace it. In a traditional museum model, an artwork could be viewed as a singular unique object (the painting itself, for instance, not a reproduction). According to Baudrillard, art in the contemporary world becomes immersed in hyperreality, wherein the boundary between the original and its representation dissolves. He states, "The simulacrum is never what hides the truth - it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true" (Baudrillard, 1981/1994, p. 1)". Applied to our context, this could mean that once it is over, the distinction between an art event and its documentation might blur — the documentation might come to be treated as equally real or even more accessible (and thus more "true" in practice) than the ephemeral event was. This means that information about an art event can displace the event itself, creating a new plane of reality. A performance's write-up or recording might circulate to an audience far wider than the one that experienced it live, thus becoming the dominant form by which the work is known. Consequently, contemporary art institutions often focus less on "art history" in the old sense (i.e., preserving masterworks for eternity) than on shaping their own histories and narratives about their activities. As Groys (2016) points out, "Today's artistic events cannot be preserved and contemplated like traditional artworks. However, they can be documented, 'covered,' narrated, and commented on. Traditional art produced art objects. Contemporary art produces information about art events" (p. 9).

In other words, the output of a biennial is more than just the art that was shown or performed, it is also the stories, discussions, and records generated around those artworks. Thus, attending a contemporary art exhibition closely resembles visiting a biennial — an

event-based time-bound experience. In either case, the question of documentation becomes unavoidable. We go to these events knowing they are temporary, and we often rely on catalogs, reviews, and archives to remember or share what happened.

Groys (2016) also discusses how this evolution affects the viewer's role, arguing that the format of contemporary exhibitions transforms the relationship between the audience and the artwork. Unlike in a traditional museum, where artworks are autonomous objects and viewers maintain control over their experience, contemporary art often functions as an event in which the viewer becomes part of the process. In this context, the audience is no longer a passive observer but is incorporated into the overall production, engaging with the art in a way that is shaped by the event's structure and documentation (p. 20). This shift results in what might be described as a loss of *gaze sovereignty* — the viewer's ability to remain detached and self-directed in their experience of art.

This dynamic differs within a contemporary art space that is oriented toward the event: art turns into a process, and the viewer becomes a participant that relinquishes the stance of autonomous observation. Groys explains, "The visitor loses his or her sovereignty in a very obvious way. Now the visitor is put inside an event and cannot meet the gaze of the camera that documents this event, the secondary gaze of the editor who does the postproduction work on the documentation, or the gaze of a later spectator of the documentation" (p. 20). Here, Groys depicts the viewer as one element among many in a larger production. You, as the audience, are being filmed, written about, or otherwise implicated in the making of the narrative. There is an element of performance in just viewing the art because the context treats everything as part of one big happening.

Groys employs the term *Gesamtkunstwerk*, typically referring to a "total work of art," in a new sense: he argues that the contemporary museum or biennial now operates as a single artistic event, in which every element — architecture, lighting, sound, documentation, and even the viewer — becomes part of one overarching installation. In this framework, engagement with art ceases to be a detached act of observation and instead transforms into a performative experience, echoing "the modernist dream of a theatre in which there is no clear boundary between the stage and the space for the audience – a dream that the theatre itself was never able to fully realise" (p. 19). The biennial format, with its immersive programs and overlapping activities, actually achieves this to some extent: the distinction between the art "on display" and the people "viewing" is blurred, as everyone and everything contributes to the overall milieu.

Sound Art Lab epitomises what Boris Groys terms "the flow" — the deliberate synchronisation of an art institution with the irreversible stream of time through an incessant sequence of mutable events (Groys 2016). Far from being a static repository, the Lab simultaneously curates the Struer Tracks Biennale, hosts masterclasses and artistic residencies, and devises educational programmes. By keeping multiple parallel temporal strands in motion, it both shapes contemporary discourse and, in line with Groys's position, anticipates — and even exceeds — contemporaneity itself.

Social-media metrics offer a sense of scale: in July 2025 Sound Art Lab's Instagram account (@soundartlab_dk) counted roughly 9,400 followers — nearly aligning with the entire population of Struer (9,893) and far exceeding the few hundred people who can realistically attend its biennial events or on-site residencies.

Several factors explain this disparity. First, Struer's remote location in Northwest Jutland makes travel costly and time-consuming, so many practitioners engage with SAL primarily online. Second, the Lab's public programming — podcasts recorded during residencies, live-streamed masterclasses, and Discord critique sessions — circulates easily across time zones, attracting listeners who approach these resources as continuing professional development. Finally, sound art itself is a niche field whose practitioners are scattered; digital channels allow for gatherings around a specialised hub without geographical constraints.

Analytics and comment threads suggest that SAL's online constituency is predominantly an international mix of emerging and mid-career sound artists, curators, audio-technology professionals, and postgraduate students — with notable clusters in the other Nordic countries, Germany, the United Kingdom, and North America. In this sense, SAL's digital sphere does not merely replicate its local audience; it constitutes a transnational network that the Lab must actively cultivate.

Consequently, remote-first activities — archived streams, open-call toolkits, and asynchronous mentoring — are no longer ancillary services, they are important means by which SAL sustains and incrementally grows the global sound-art community. The institution's curatorial task, therefore, is to maintain a productive feedback loop between its small in-person cohort in Struer and its far wider online public dispersed across the globe.

The almanac, in turn, serves as a striking example of a flow existing within a flow: While it does not preserve the sound itself, it establishes a platform for reflection, discussion, and interpretation. Thus, rather than competing with the live experience of sound, the almanac introduces structures of conceptual continuity while acknowledging that sound remains elusive and impossible to fully capture in textual form.

For instance, the almanac may include essays, interviews, drawings, or notations that respond to each sound artwork, thereby creating a dialogic record. However, it never claims to be the sound art itself — only a collection of perspectives on it. In this way, the almanac provides a communal space in print where the transient event can be revisited and re-contextualised through multiple voices. While sound itself cannot be contained, the almanac allows people to come together afterwards to reflect on its significance, preserving its memory and sustaining its influence.

The almanac offers a conceptual and conversational continuity rather than that of an unchanged artifact. It effectively time-shifts the engagement: the sound occurs in the moment, but the almanac allows for discussion and interpretation to unfold over a longer duration — before, during, and after the event. In doing so, it upholds an idea that is echoed by Voegelin and others: writing about sound is not about fixing it in place but about continually engaging with its possibilities.

The next section explores another challenge in documenting sound: the extreme subjectivity of its perception.

3.3 Embodied Perception and Affective Mediation

The following integrated section draws together the phenomenological (Ihde, Nancy), psychoanalytic (Lacan), affective (Carroll, Ahmed) and Zen-informed strands that were previously dispersed, in order to show how listening becomes a site of both subjective constitution and shared cultural coding. Just as the non-visual nature of sound complicates its documentation, the ultra-subjective nature of listening further intensifies this challenge. The same auditory event can be experienced by different people in entirely different ways, depending on the individual habitus of the listener — their personal background, memories, and sensory tendencies. Voegelin emphasises this individuality in listening with this statement, "What I hear is discovered, not received," underscoring that each person's sonic reality is a "generative fantasy" (Voegelin, 2010, p. 4). From her perspective, it is impossible to access the "true nature" of a sonic object:

"Between my heard and the sonic object/phenomenon I will never know its truth but can only invent it, producing a knowing for me" (Voegelin, 2010, p. 5).

In other words, whenever we describe or interpret a sound, we are essentially inventing a version of it that makes sense to us — a version potentially quite different from that of another

listener. The act of listening is a creative, constructive act, and any documentation of sound necessarily reflects the subjective reality of the listener rather than providing an objective account.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty develops a complementary idea in Phenomenology of Perception, emphasising the embodied nature of all perception. He famously stated, “The body is our anchorage in a world” and “The body is our general means of having a world” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. xii). Our bodily presence is what allows us to experience anything at all. The state closest to “pure sensing,” he suggests, might be the liminal experience of half-sleep, where external influences diminish and the mind’s interpretations relax. Nevertheless, even then, we continue to “hear ourselves” uninterruptedly (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 25). We remain aware of our faint bodily sounds and the continuity of our existence. The implication is that we can never completely strip away interpretation and self – even in near-silence, we perceive from a particular vantage point (our body, our self). For sound, this means no two people will ever hear precisely the same thing because each person’s body and mind inflect the experience.

The inescapable role of subjective interpretation in auditory perception raises the question of whether listening can ever occur independently of meaning-making. This issue has been a central concern in both philosophy and art. Zen Buddhist traditionalists , for example, propose an alternative approach to perception that emphasises direct and unmediated engagement with phenomena. This principle resonates with the poetic advice of Matsuo Bashō (17th century), who wrote, “Learn about a pine tree from a pine tree, and about a bamboo stalk from a bamboo stalk” (Bashō, 1985, p. 14). Bashō’s point is that one should encounter things on their own terms — such as immersing oneself in the actual presence of the pine or bamboo — rather than bringing preconceived concepts to them.

While Western philosophy often centers on the knowing subject (the “I” that analyses and categorises), Eastern practices like Zen seek to minimize the “I” so that sound (or any phenomenon) can be perceived “as it is.” Alan Watts (1957) explains: “Zen has no goal; it is traveling without point, with nowhere to go. Yet, it is at this very moment that the self disappears” (p. 176). In the Zen mindset, one does not listen in order to achieve something or to judge what is heard; one just listens, and in the purity of that moment, the sense of a separate self can fall away.

D. T. Suzuki (1927) similarly asserts that “Zen in its essence is the art of seeing into the nature of one’s own being, and it points the way from bondage to freedom” (p. 15). By “bondage,” Suzuki refers to the ego and its attachments that color experience. The “freedom” is a state where perception is not constantly filtered through personal biases. Translating this

to sound: a Zen-influenced approach would be to hear sounds without immediately labeling or evaluating them, letting them wash over you and observing them without the usual internal commentary.

Deeply influenced by Zen philosophy, American composer John Cage famously sought ways to reduce personal interference in the perception of sound — yet he consistently affirmed that listening is always subjective. In Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts, Douglas Kahn (1999) discusses Cage's engagement with Zen, explaining that Cage's approach to listening was shaped by his understanding of chance operations and openness to all sounds. This was most vividly realised in Cage's seminal piece 4'33", in which the performance consists of intentional silence from the performer. The audience, expecting "music," instead hears the ambient sounds of the environment — coughs, rustling, distant traffic, the hum of the room — becoming acutely aware of them. Cage emphasised that absolute silence does not exist; rather, "silence" becomes a moment of active listening, where the usually ignored background sounds come to the foreground.

Despite his efforts to eliminate subjective interference, Cage ultimately demonstrates that sound is inevitably experienced through the body and mind of the listener. As Kahn explains, "Cage seemed to want more than to sustain the time of lived experience, which would be re-established with each playback. He was attached also to its original phenomenality, which would be debased by the exclusion of everything that accompanied the sound" (Kahn, 1999, p. 265). In other words, Cage valued the total situation of a sound — the exact conditions and incidental noises of each performance — and realised that recording or notating the piece would strip away those unique embodied aspects.

Thus, even when a listener attempts to perceive sound in the most Zen-like manner, minimising the "I," the act of perception remains bound to embodied experience and individual auditory fields. Cage himself acknowledges this paradox: "The purpose of this music is to sober and quiet the mind, thus rendering it susceptible to divine influences" (Cage, 1961, p. 158).

This paradox is central to the nature of listening: even if we strive to "listen without a listener" (as Zen philosophers might encourage), perception inevitably passes through a subjective bodily experience. Zen practice can shift one's orientation, making the listening process more open and less judgmental. Rather than replacing the self, however, it produces a different experience of it – one that might feel merged with sound or empty of active thought. In the end, listening is always a meeting of sound and person. While Eastern philosophies provide tools to minimise personal bias, and Cage's work shows the value of embracing all

sounds equally, neither approach can grant truly objective listening that is free from human context.

If listening is inherently a subjective process, what, then, unites us as listeners during a performance beyond the mere fact of co-presence in space and time? Imagine an audience at a sound art event: they are all in the same room, at the same time, immersed in the same waves of sound. Yet each individual may perceive something different. Is there anything that could be considered a shared point of intersection in their experiences? One candidate for such commonality is emotion. People often have emotional reactions when confronted with art; reactions that, while deeply personal, can be resonant across individuals and shaped by shared culture

The next section explores this emotional dimension further, examining how feelings and affective responses contribute to the way sound is experienced, interpreted, and remembered.

One place where the individual and the collective experience intertwine is in the domain of feeling, where emotions — however personal — are shaped by shared cultural codes. These affective crossovers return the discussion to the political stakes sketched earlier. S. D. Chrostowska, writing on utopia as a method in an age of survival, reminds us that collective horizons endure only through educated desire — a cultivated readiness both to be moved and to move others (Chrostowska 2021, p. 55). By foregrounding the sensorial labour through which listening educates desire, the analysis prepares the next chapter's shift from phenomenology to institutional design: how the biennial, as a global-local form, seeks to stage precisely such anticipatory desires in civic space.

Emotional response offers a fragile bridge between private perception and public discourse. Drawing on Noël Carroll's idea of "lexical emotions" and Maggie Nelson's critique of unbounded artistic freedom, this section traces how culturally patterned feelings lend a measure of commonality to otherwise divergent listening experiences. At the same time, it warns against treating those patterns as fixed templates, for art's critical potential lies precisely in its capacity to disrupt habitual moods and expectations.

Salomé Voegelin engages with Noël Carroll's ideas in order to explore the issue of common ground in listening. Carroll makes a clear distinction between the perception of contemporary art and the emotional reactions it evokes, noting that emotions frequently receive insufficient critical attention. He argues that emotions, despite their subjectivity, provide a form of commonality due to culturally established criteria that defines the normative correctness of emotional responses: "Within the boundaries of certain cultures, there are certain criteria

concerning which emotional responses are normatively correct" (Voegelin, 2010, p. 173). Carroll presumes that emotional reactions to art are structured and cognitively understandable within particularcultural contexts. For instance, culturally established patterns dictate predictable responses, such as the sadness triggered by a mournful melody or the surprise elicited by sudden loud sounds. This potentially leads to shared emotional experiences among listeners from similar backgrounds (Voegelin, 2010, p. 173).

Voegelin contrasts Carroll's structured perspective on emotions with Plato's views. Whereas Plato perceived emotions as chaotic and destabilising — forces that "stimulate and corrupt experience, undermine reason and logic," threatening social cohesion — Carroll perceives emotions as rational and structured ("lexical emotions"), capable of facilitating, rather than obstructing, the intended meaning of the artwork. Voegelin summarises Carroll's stance:

"Carroll's lexical emotions are reasoned, they are rational, do not threaten but enable the production of the work as an objective ideality. They are not sensations but sentiments: thoughts that signify sensations" (Voegelin, 2010, p. 173).

According to Voegelin, Carroll considers emotional responses to be cognitive and culturally encoded, thus ensuring a predictable and normative emotional reaction within the audience. In doing so, Carroll effectively reduces the subjective aspect of perception, assuming the viewer's emotional response to be primarily a reflection of cultural positioning rather than individual subjectivity (Voegelin, 2010, p. 174).

However, Voegelin critiques this emphasis on cultural norms and predictability. She argues that Carroll's approach creates an illusion of stability in emotional responses, potentially limiting the transformative and disruptive power of art. From Voegelin's perspective, art's true potential lies precisely in its ability to challenge habitual emotional patterns, thereby provoking unexpected and deeply personal reactions. Carroll's structured emotional framework risks turning art into predictable cultural expressions, thereby diminishing its power to surprise, challenge, or personally affect the listener (Voegelin, 2010, pp. 174–175).

The question of emotions in artistic perception is closely linked to the broader issue of artistic freedom and responsibility. Maggie Nelson, in On Freedom (2021), explores artistic freedom from a dual perspective: the freedom of the artist to create and the freedom of the audience to interpret and experience art. She critiques the notion of "absolute freedom," stating, "Whenever someone starts talking about 'absolute freedom,' you know you are in the presence of a straw man" (Nelson, 2021, REPARATIVE, REDUX section). She argues that no artist

operates in isolation, as all artistic expressions require “planning, permission, negotiation” to be exhibited and experienced (Nelson, 2021, REPARATIVE, REDUX section). This highlights how creative work is shaped not just by the artist’s vision, but by sociocultural structures and institutional constraints as well.

Nelson also challenges the fantasy of boundless artistic imagination, emphasising that, “unboundedness, even in art or imagination, is a fantasy… I personally know of no artist who has gotten very far into adulthood who still thinks of her imagination as ‘some special, uninfiltrated realm that transcends the messy realities of our lives and minds’” (Nelson, 2021, Cops in the Head section). She supports this argument by referencing Merleau-Ponty’s reflections on Cézanne, illustrating that artistic creation is always entangled with lived experience: “That is why he never finished working. We never get away from our life. We never see ideas or freedom face to face” (Nelson, 2021, Cops in the Head section).

Furthermore, Nelson introduces the metaphor of “cops in the head” to describe the internalised social pressures and self-censorship that artists face: “The cops in the head have metastasised to include a chorus of disembodied strangers standing at the ready to trash-talk not only your work but also your appearance, your attachments, your demographic markers, your family, and more” (Nelson, 2021, Cops in the Head section). This metaphor underscores how artists — and audiences — carry societal voices within their private imaginative processes.

Thus, Nelson’s perspective suggests that emotions in art are not purely personal experiences, that they are in fact embedded in a communal dialogue between artist and audience. While emotional responses may be subjective, they are shaped by cultural references and collective discourse. In the context of sound art, this means that while one listener might feel startled and another might feel moved, they share an overarching cultural framework that provides a shared emotional bridge.

The next section (3.5) examines how the almanac, as a textual instrument, does not document sound, but rather extends and expands the listening experience through collective reflection and dialogic interaction.

If listening is co-creative and affectively charged, any textual response must honour that fluidity rather than freeze it, which is where the Almanac fits into the curatorial frame.

3.4 Almanac as Textual Supplement

Marshall McLuhan, in Understanding Media, articulated the principle that "the medium is the message." This emphasises that perception and meaning are shaped not only by content, but by the mode of its transmission as well (McLuhan, 1964, p. 7). In the context of sound art, this notion is particularly salient. Conventional forms of documentation — such as audio recordings, transcriptions, and critical analyses — do not preserve the sonic event in its entirety, as the act of documentation itself inevitably alters the nature of the experience. A recording, for instance, transforms an event into a reproducible artifact, thereby reframing the factors of temporality and spatial contingency that characterise live sound, detaching it from the listener's embodied and situational engagement. Similarly, a written account translates auditory phenomena into linguistic structures, imposing conceptual and categorical constraints on what was originally perceived in a sonic form.

Each instance of documentation thus generates a distinct ontological shift: rather than capturing sound as it occurs, it produces a new representational construct — a recorded trace or textual interpretation — that exists independently of the original performative and perceptual conditions. This raises a fundamental question: if sound is inherently processual, non-visual, and inseparable from the listener — what role does writing about it serve?

Salomé Voegelin offers a perspective on how writing (or thinking) can approach sound's evasive nature by drawing on John Ruskin's notion of the "pathetic." She repurposes Ruskin's concept to articulate what she calls a "pathetic trigger," defined as "an affect that initiates the action of perception through which its sensation is realised" (Voegelin, 2010, p. 177). In Ruskin's theory of the "pathetic fallacy," projecting human emotions onto inanimate nature was seen as a poetic error — a sentimental falsification. However, Voegelin turns this on its head by defending those projections in the context of sound, considering them an imaginative potential that escapes purely rational analysis. "I use his pathetic not to denounce the fantasies thus triggered, but to explicitly stress the imaginative possibility of sound," she explains (Voegelin, 2010, p. 177). In other words, when a sound makes us imagine or feel something that is not literally in the sound (like feeling loneliness when listening to the sound of a distant train whistle, for instance), that fantasy or subjective impression is not a mistake — it is actually a central way by which we experience and create meaning from sound. She contends that this "pathetic coincidence" of sonic perception — the convergence of external sound and internal effect — is what catalyses our engagement with a sound work: "It is precisely the pathetic coincidence of sonic perception that triggers the engagement necessary to produce the work in its sensate sense" (Voegelin, 2010, p. 177). Here, "produce the work" means that the artwork truly comes into being for us through our sensing of it. Without that

affective trigger, we might hear the sound physically without connecting with it as art or meaning.

Voegelin does not consider this so-called "pathetic" mode of reception a cognitive error at all, rather she views it as a generator of truth — in the sense of direct and felt experience. She writes, "This generative perception is not an error, it is not irrational and solipsistic; it is not a fallacy nor is it falsifying but [it] generates the truth as an experiential truth for me" (Voegelin, 2010, p. 177).

Through using the words "for me", Voegelin is reclaiming her subjective experience as a kind of truth that is personal and experiential rather than universal and abstract. She challenges how cognition is often prioritised over effect by suggesting that language and cultural cohesion, though vital, do not precede the sonic experience but rather emerge from it. "The cognitive that ensures language and cultural cohesion does not come before this pathetic truth," she asserts, "it is not a given, but is triggered by the pull of its affection" (Voegelin, 2010, p. 177). In other words, before we can talk about a sound or integrate it into shared culture, we must first feel it. That feeling draws out words and connections; it inspires the very language and shared understanding that we later build around the sound.

This resonates with Lacan's psychoanalytic principle of "floating attention" (écoute flottante), which calls for openness to the unexpected and the unarticulated within listening. Just as a therapist might listen without a rigid framework in order to catch the affective cues and unconscious resonances of a patient's speech, a writer or sound documentarian might practice a kind of floating listening — waiting for the pathetic triggers that spark insight, rather than imposing a strict schema on the sound. For Voegelin, the "pathetic trigger" brings forth sonic meaning beyond predetermined linguistic structures. It encourages writing that is responsive to how sound feels, not just what it technically is.

Voegelin further addresses moments when sound's intensity surpasses the boundaries of articulated speech, reducing one to a state of pre-linguistic sensibility. "The affective action of noise is 'unsayable' in and of itself," she notes, "but it urges towards speech as the practical expression of my own experience" (Voegelin, 2010, p. 178).

We might think of an extremely loud or unexpected noise that leaves us momentarily speechless or reacting with a gasp — it bypasses rational processing and hits the body directly. Sound acts upon the body, therefore its effect is a tangible and real interaction rather than an abstract or purely conceptual one.

Eventually, this bodily encounter can lead to speech (or writing), though not in the conventional sense. Rather than describing the sound's technical properties, the resulting

speech attempts to convey our experience of sound. “Since sound happens on the body, this affective action is a real action and will eventually lead to speech: when my body meets your body in the simultaneity of both our perception” (Voegelin, 2010, p. 178). Within the context of perception, the phrase “when my body meets your body” wonderfully captures the communal aspect of listening yet again. The implication is that when we later speak about the sound, it is an act reaching out — from my embodied experience to yours — and it is an attempt to find a linguistic common ground that overcomes what was initially non-verbal.

A vivid example she provides is Japanese noise artist Keiji Haino’s vocal performance, wherein his guttural shouts and screams effectively break apart language and bridge the distance between performer and listener. “His shouts collapse the distance of language and meet my body in the sensation of his utterances” (Voegelin, 2010, p. 180). In that moment of listening, one is not parsing words or meaning — they are simply feeling the voice as pure sonic force. It is only after that fact, when we reflect, that we attempt to put that feeling into words.

Voegelin’s phenomenological approach to sound also shapes her methodological stance on writing about sound. She emphasises that a philosophy of sound art cannot rigidly enclose the experience within theoretical boundaries. It must instead remain open-ended. “A philosophy of sound art cannot sum up experience but must remain a philosophical experience, proposing a strategy of engagement but not conclude the heard” (Voegelin, 2010, p. 132).

This guiding principle strongly applies to the almanac as well. It should propose ways to engage with the sound art (through essays, narratives, notations, etc.) without presuming to have the final word that “concludes” or exhausts what was heard. There should always be room for further interpretation, disagreement, and surprise. Voegelin also underlines the paradox of writing about sound, noting that “to write about sound is to be engaged in this problem and to practice its own contradiction” (Voegelin, 2010, p. 132). Discussing sound inevitably brings us back to language, which is a visual linear medium, whereas sound itself remains elusive and resistant to complete description. In this sense, writing about sound both highlights the limitations of language and stretches those limits, expanding our understanding of both sound and the nature of philosophy and aesthetics.

The almanac, therefore, cannot archive the unarchivable in any absolute sense; instead, it fosters ongoing reflection, discourse, and engagement to ensure that conversations around sonic practices remain open and in continuous motion within a community of listeners and practitioners.

Rather than attempting to document or preserve sound — processes inherently misaligned with its live, relational, and context-dependent nature — the almanac provides a textual space for collective inquiry and dialogue. Its purpose is not to archive sonic events themselves, but rather assemble a range of responses, including essays, interviews, dialogues, critical analyses, and personal narratives that explore how sound actively shapes communal bonds and interactions.

As previous sections have demonstrated, sound art challenges conventional modes of representation because it is simultaneously experiential, relational, and inherently transient. Each sonic event is inseparable from the active participation of listeners, forming what has previously been conceptualised as a listening machine — an interplay between listener, environment, and sound that operates on material, psychological, and social levels. It is for that reason , sound art fundamentally resists fixed descriptions or static interpretations.

Instead of attempting to document sound, the almanac acknowledges and embraces this resistance, offering a textual medium that extends the interpretative and affective engagement initiated by the sonic encounter. However, its role extends beyond that of mere reflection. Drawing on Boris Groys' concept of the institution as a flow rather than a static structure, the almanac itself functions as an active part of the curatorial process, shaping discourse rather than simply recording it. It does not seek to capture sound as an object, but rather aims to sustain and expand its presence through collective thought and interpretation.

At the same time, it is essential to recognise this medium's inherent limitations: the ideas, thoughts, and analysis it gathers can only guide or outline the listening experience — they can never fully substitute for it. Sound itself remains beyond complete verbalisation. Yet, following Groys' perspective, the almanac's significance is precisely in its capacity to keep sound art in motion — not as a static archive, but as a curatorial strategy that cultivates ongoing dialogue. By facilitating critical engagement, fostering discourse, and continuously recontextualising sonic practices, the almanac ensures that sound art does not merely exist in isolated moments of perception but resonates within a broader evolving cultural and intellectual landscape.

By tracing the path from historical doubt to institutional flow, embodied perception and shared effect, the chapter demonstrates why any engagement with sound must remain provisional. The Almanac embraces that provisionality, setting the stage for the following chapter's analysis of how Struer Tracks translates these insights into a festival architecture of listening, dialogue, and communal care.

4 Biennials and the Case of Struer Tracks 2025

Chapter 4 opens by situating the biennial as a distinctive curatorial form that has shifted from national prestige projects to hybrid platforms of global discourse and local engagement. In Part 4.1, we trace the format's evolution—from the late-19th-century model of nation-state competition to post-colonial laboratories of critique—and consider the crisis of trust that ensued after 2008, when universal claims collided with local constraints.

Building on this general genealogy, the chapter then turns in Part 4.2 to the particular case of Struer, examining how a small Danish town leveraged its industrial heritage and place-branding as "City of Sound" to develop symbolic capital. Part 4.3 analyses Jacob Eriksen's curatorial concept of "Kommunal Praksis," showing how municipal routines become material for communal reflection. Finally, Part 4.4 maps the festival's programme—its spatial logic, participatory formats and institutional partnerships—and demonstrates how these real-world strategies address our four hypotheses of broadening participation, reducing elitism, deepening discourse and promoting critical reflection.

4.1 Biennial Genealogies & Crisis of Trust

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, global political and economic shifts over the recent decades have re-oriented artistic production and generated new curatorial strategies that, despite their claim of 'criticality', often continue to serve elite interests. Here I trace the institutional evolution of the biennial format in more detail and then turn the focus towards Struer Tracks.

The contemporary biennial is not merely a periodic exhibition but a multi-layered phenomenon. According to Panos Kompatsiaris, it acts simultaneously as an exhibition, an institution, a discursive platform, and an instrument of symbolic production (Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 22). Although the Venice Biennale is entrenched as the 'first' and supposedly normative model, Kompatsiaris stresses that "the signifier of art through which the biennial addresses itself to the public is … framed in radically different, if not oppositional, ways in the early manifestation of the phenomenon and the contemporary one" (Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 24).

Founded in 1895, the Venice Biennale was "by today's standards an elitist site, where beauty was seen as a matter of refined taste and enculturation" (West, 1995, p. 404, cited in Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 23). Its first iteration aspired to present "a collection of soberly

measured original and nominated works, including many of the most distinguished artists of Europe" (West, 1995, p. 404, cited in Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 23). The national-pavilion structure reproduced the logic of nineteenth-century world's fairs: art functioned as a marker of national prestige and of the modernising ambitions of the young Italian state. Thus a modernist hierarchy of taste was installed: Europe's 'best artists' presented 'carefully selected' works in a ceremonial setting. The model entrenched cultural exclusivity and implied that artistic value was determined by recognised institutions and by the pavilions in the Giardini. In its original configuration, the biennial was embedded in colonial hierarchies: Europe set the canon, the rest of the world served as 'periphery'.

Consequently, treating the Venice Biennale as a universal archetype is problematic. Later biennials emerging in the late twentieth century took shape amid decolonisation, global migration, and shifting economic models, thereby re-working the modernist legacy into more flexible and politically charged formats. The format then underwent a radical transformation from the late 20th century onward, evolving from an aesthetic-institutional model of 'nations in competition' to a platform oriented towards political and critical statements (Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 24).

Kompatsiaris highlights the Havana Biennial, which was established during 1984 in socialist Cuba by the Centre for the Development of Contemporary Art. Rafal Niemojewski argues that this exhibition "rather than the Venice Biennale, … set the agenda for subsequent biennials" (Niemojewski, 2010, cited in Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 25). From the outset Havana combined an exhibition with performances, urban interventions, an international symposium, lectures, and publications; its collectivised curatorial group foregrounded horizontal dialogue. Thematically it focused on centre/periphery relations, post-colonialism, diaspora, and cultural hybridity — questions that later became central to the biennial discourse of the 1990s (Kompatsiaris, 2017, pp. 24–25). The shift was ideological as well as thematic: rather than modernist national rivalry, Havana advanced an anti-colonial 'Third-World' agenda, giving a platform to previously marginalised scenes in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Unlike the Venetian pavilion model with strict selection, the Havana Biennial offered a multi-focal 'laboratory' format in which exhibition, education programme, and public actions mutually reinforced one another. It demonstrated that a biennial could be a hybrid critical platform, rather than merely a trophy case of artistic 'progress', and it provided a template later revisited — each in its own way — by Johannesburg, Shanghai, Gwangju, and others. In the field of sound art, this laboratory ethos would later become a reference point for younger, medium-specific biennials such as Sonic Acts (Amsterdam, 1994 →), Ultima Oslo

Contemporary Music Biennale (Norway, 1990 →) and, most recently, Struer Tracks in Denmark, which explicitly brands itself "a living laboratory for sound and listening" (Struer Tracks, n.d.). Thus, while Venice supplied the pavilion blueprint, Havana pioneered the biennial-as-platform—and the sonic biennials adopted the latter as a model for process-driven engagement.

The act of naming is more than just a formality; it is discursive in and of itself. Nikolas Rose underlines that "naming is itself a creative act: it assembles a new individuation of concepts, symptoms, moralities, languages" (Rose 1999, 28, cited in Kompatsiaris 2017, 23). In other words, the label we choose not only describes a practice but also scripts its future behaviour and the expectations that surround it.

The single word biennial thus activates an "imagined constellation" of values — cosmopolitanism, artistic progressiveness, participation in the global art economy, and high symbolic capital (Kompatsiaris 2017, 23).

The Bangkok Biennial 2018 provides a telling stress-test for the power invested in the biennial label. Dutch art-and-urban researchers Lara van Meeteren (independent curator and art historian) and Bart Wissink (associate professor of urban studies, City University of Hong Kong) — long-term observers of Thailand's art scene — show that the founding team, an anonymous collective using the alias Lord Jim, deliberately rejected the classic mega-exhibition model (van Meeteren & Wissink, 2023). Instead of a single, centrally curated show, they set up a web-based, open-source framework: any artist group, gallery, neighbourhood committee or individual practitioner could declare a pavilion simply by registering it on the festival website. A pavilion might be a rented shophouse, a boat on the Chao Phraya, or an online room; content, funding and logistics remained the sole responsibility of its initiators. By July 2018 the map listed roughly seventy self-organised pavilions hosting more than 150 artists, most in Bangkok but some in Chiang Mai, Pattani, Rotterdam and cyberspace (van Meeteren & Wissink, 2023, pp. 1–2).

This do-it-yourself structure positioned the Bangkok Biennial as a counter-point to the concurrently launched Bangkok Art Biennale (BAB), a far more traditional event run by the Bangkok Art & Culture Centre and the BAB Foundation with heavyweight state-corporate sponsors such as ThaiBev and One Bangkok (Bangkok Art Biennale Foundation, 2018). Whereas BAB followed the Venice template of a star curatorial team, blockbuster venues and a media campaign aimed at cultural tourism, the Bangkok Biennial sought to flatten hierarchies and sidestep gatekeeping. Yet van Meeteren and Wissink's fieldwork demonstrates that symbolic gravity proved hard to escape. Even a 'no-rules' biennial still borrowed the term

pavilion — laden with Venice connotations — relied on English-language press kits to signal international relevance, and triggered the familiar scramble for visibility, sponsorship and Instagram-friendly spectacles (van Meeteren & Wissink, 2023, p. 3). In short, "even when attempting to resist hegemonic norms, the symbolic frameworks of the global biennial model continue to shape expectations and practices" (van Meeteren & Wissink, 2023, p. 3): the Bangkok experiment shows that the label grants access to global discourse while simultaneously reinscribing the very power geometries it aspires to dissolve.

Collier and Ong call such travelling structures global forms — universal not through standardisation but through their capacity for contextual adaptation (Collier & Ong, 2005, cited in Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 25). They "travel", being re-defined in dialogue with local politics, economics, and cultural infrastructures: recognisable yet always different. Kompatsiaris therefore proposes abandoning Venice as the universal archetype and adopting Foucault's notion of complex singularity: each event emerges from multiple relational interactions (Foucault, 2008, cited in Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 25). A biennial is a 'complex singularity': embedded in a global network yet unique. The label expands visibility yet inserts the institution into a corset of norms.

Sound-art biennials illustrate this dynamic vividly. Over the last decade, a cluster of small-scale yet internationally networked sonic festivals—Sonic Acts (NL), Tsonami (CL), Echos (BR) and Struer Tracks (DK)—have leveraged the "biennial" name to access EU funding, artist-in-residence circuits and academic partnerships, while tailoring programmes to local acoustemologies and social issues (Dees, 2024). Their success demonstrates both the mobility of the biennial template and its persistent pull toward global legibility.

The duality of standardised recognisability and radical contextuality sets the stage for a crisis of trust after the 2008 global financial crash exposed contradictions between universalist claims and local costs. While the debate was ignited by the 2008 financial crash in Europe, similar tensions have surfaced across the global biennial circuit — from São Paulo and Sharjah to Gwangju and Kochi-Muziris. The crisis of trust, therefore, is not confined to a single region; it reflects a worldwide scepticism toward cultural platforms that rely on the very state-corporate alliances they claim to critique.

Concepts such as parrhesia and coded dissent emerged, signalling growing suspicion towards institutions that proclaim political engagement yet remain embedded in the very capitalist mechanisms they critique.

By the 2010s, the concept of the biennial as a space of authentic political involvement was met with a wave of scepticism. The multiple crises of 2008, along with the European debt crisis, exposed how dependent cultural institutions truly are on corporate and state-elite funding. Echoing critiques by Sheikh and Bourriaud, Kompatsiaris observes that biennials are increasingly perceived as a "hypocritical, suspicious establishment" that "advocate[s] resistant politics […] but firmly adhere[s] to the capitalist reason" (Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 4). Establishing legitimacy becomes an even greater challenge when progressive rhetoric co-exists with an infrastructure embedded in tourism, real-estate, and city branding.

A symptom of this condition is the absence of parrhesia — the Foucauldian courage to "speak truth to power" despite risk (Kompatsiaris, 2017, pp. 3–4). Biennials become sites of coded dissent, where radical language functions as a mask: protest turns into a stylistic device without affecting power structures. The 3rd Athens Biennial (MONODROME, 2011) staged abandoned factories and film studios as aestheticised 'economic ruins'; financial partners, including banks, gained symbolic profit from the exhibition's cultural capital (Tsilimpounidi & Walsh, 2014). A similar scenario unfolded at the 7th Berlin Biennial (2012) curated by Artur Żmijewski. The project Forget Fear turned KW Institute into a forum for political debate with an Occupy Berlin camp, yet activists noted that their radical agenda was becoming a "museum exhibit" while the institution channelled media attention and funding through habitual art circuits (Steyerl, 2012). Both cases show how hard it is for an exhibition to move beyond its aesthetic container and translate radical declarations into effective political intervention. Thus, the critical speech associated with the biennial in the early 2010's was often read as a language of disagreement that is ironically and conveniently safe for the institution.

Drawing on Jacques Rancière, Kompatsiaris identifies a tension between two logics of the biennial's aesthetic regime. The first — the logic of art becoming life — implies that art seeks to dissolve into everyday life "at the price of its self-elimination" (Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 15, after Rancière, 2009b). The second allows art to participate in politics "on the express condition of not having anything to do with it." Contemporary debate moves between these poles, asking whether a biennial must be 'critical' and whether it can truly satisfy that demand.

On an institutional level, almost every major contemporary project associates itself with social engagement, resistance, participation, radical care, and similar values. Such rhetorical markers have become symbolic capital, convertible into the currency of legitimacy. Yet criticality is not given a priori; it is constructed each time and may collide with the limits of the format. Rancière warns that "there is no straight road from the aesthetics of art to the politics

of emancipation" (Rancière, 2009a, p. 45). Without distance, art is at risk of dissolving into activism and losing its specific field of effects. On the other hand, maintaining excessive distance would render any political claims ineffective.

Kompatsiaris concludes that biennial criticality is not an ontological duty, rather it calls for perpetual bargaining and balancing between artistic autonomy and social demand. Although the command 'be critical' has turned into an institutional norm, that very norm breeds scepticism, as once a critical gesture is fixed as obligatory, it becomes predictable and easily absorbed. Kompatsiaris terms this conversion of radical rhetoric into coded dissent — a language of disagreement safe for institutional use (Kompatsiaris, 2017, pp. 4–8). The biennial faces a dilemma: deeper political engagement may alienate audiences and erode aesthetic specificity, whereas maintaining autonomy invites accusations of hypocrisy.

Because criticality is not automatic, each institution must justify why participation in the global art economy should count as resistance rather than complicity. Kompatsiaris borrows institutional rationalisation from Boltanski and Thévenot: actors justify actions by appealing to a universal principle — generalisation (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). In art this often becomes the people's good: the claim that exhibitive practice benefits 'the people' or specifically marginalised groups (Stavrakakis, 2014, cited in Kompatsiaris, 2017). Without such justification, a 'critical' biennial risks appearing declarative, as its infrastructure still operates within capitalist accumulation.

The key mechanism of rationalisation is self-reflexivity — publicly acknowledging one's entanglement. KW Institute director Gabriele Horn asks: "Am I a gentrifier? Are Berlin Biennale curators minions of cultural policy?" This displays what Tiziana Terranova calls ordinary psychopathology — a split between critique and inevitable complicity (Terranova, 2013, cited in Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 37). Acknowledging contradictions becomes part of the biennial's critical brand.

However, self-reflexivity alone does not guarantee transformation. Rationalisation acts as a two-way filter, increasing trust within a discursive field while exposing boundaries that the institution will not cross. Hence the question "Must a biennial be critical?" is accompanied with "Can it justify its criticality to multiple, and often conflicting, audiences without substituting political action with style?" Esche writes: "Art is, after all, not the same as politics … it has 'to face its own task without any illusion'" (Esche, 2005, p. 3). Art, as well as the institutions that support, it can no longer pretend to substitute for politics. A new mode of action must be invented as art, despite being different from politics, must remain deeply political.

Esche imagines art centres and biennials as spaces of democratic deviance — places where deviation from established norms is permitted and culture articulates what does not fit late-capitalist agendas. Such spaces "function modestly, over time and in relation to the city itself" (Esche, 2005, p. 8), that is, through gradual, contextual alternative-building rather than singular heroic gesture.

Michel Foucault emphasises the notion of immanent resistance: "power relations are everywhere" and "there is no single locus of the Great Refusal" (Foucault, 1978, cited in Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 36). Attempting to step outside the confines of power becomes illusory — "there is no outside" (Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 36). Gerald Raunig critiques the purist approach that ignores technologies of self-government and subjectivation (Raunig, 2009, cited in Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 36). Power shapes us; abandoning institutions for the sake of 'purity' is a fiction.

Immanent resistance — working with the structure rather than demolishing it — acknowledges the impossibility of an outside and redirects critique towards internal redistribution of forces. Participatory awareness of complicity, with critical surplus, can generate real shifts that result in the reallocation of resources, the foregrounding of new actors, and transformation within discourses.

Therefore, viewing the biennial as a complex singularity reveals that each exists at the intersection of local constraints and global norms. The institution must demonstrate criticality through self-reflexivity while avoiding collapse into coded dissent. Criticality is constructed through constant bargaining; the key is an embedded element of instability, not a rhetorical pose.

4.2 Struer: History, Symbolic Capital & Local Context

The small port town of Struer lies on the Limfjord in Central Jutland. As of 1 January 2025, the municipality counted 20, 229 inhabitants, roughly half of whom reside in the town itself. The development of the locality has long been shaped by Bang & Olufsen, a company founded in Struer in 1925. Having employed a large part of the population, the company's presence played a defining role in Struer's evolution, as well as the emergence of its distinctive "sonic DNA". Confronted with impending population decline by the turn of the 2000's, — as well as the need for a new identity — the city council adopted the place-branding programme "Struer:City of Sound". As Head of the City of Sound project, Peter Kjeldbjerg

emphasises, “The idea of the City of Sound came into existence in 2008, and in 2011 the city council decided to promote Struer as ‘The City of Sound’” (Kjeldbjerg, 2020, para. 7). Since 2018 a dedicated municipal team has advanced the brand in partnership with the cluster Sound Hub Denmark and other audio-technology start-ups: “The hope in the long run is that Struer city centre will develop into a kind of living laboratory for sound, inviting businesses, researchers, and organisations to exhibit, test, and evaluate technologies and solutions in Struer” (Kjeldbjerg, 2020, para. 12).

The Bang & Olufsen archive is an important part of Struer’s heritage,often mentioned when the municipality applies for EU cultural funds or seeks to attract audio-tech start-ups (Boye, 2024). By referring to this legacy, Struer Tracks can frame itself as a present-day continuation of the town’s long-standing interest in sound.

4.3 Kommunal Praksis as Curatorial Model

Director of Sound Art Lab and curator of Struer Tracks, Jacob Eriksen, acknowledges the ambiguity of his placement within the municipal apparatus: “Being situated in a municipality, in a public administration system … is a bit weird” (J. Eriksen, personal communication, 14 March 2025). He immediately clarifies: “We feel weird, and I mean that in a very positive sense. We feel weird about being within the realm of kommunal praksis, of public administration” (J. Eriksen, personal communication, 14 March 2025). Rejecting Foucault’s notion of the detached observer, Eriksen chooses to act from the inside, transforming limiting regulations into a resource for artistic manoeuvre. Here Maria Lind’s concept of “weak resistance” becomes apparent: institutional rules are deployed to “open their own doors.” Eriksen concedes, “This also has its strengths. The weirdness is that it’s quirky, it’s funny. At the same time it can also be a burden — we really have to follow some rules. Then again it opens doors: to direct help from the rest of the municipality, contact with other groups within or outside the public administrative system” (J. Eriksen, personal communication, 14 March 2025). Compliance secures access to city venues, funding and partnership networks, even as their functions are quietly reconfigured.

The biennial provides a platform where contemporary sound art engages with local culture: through collaborations between artists and community groups, and through organically embedded artistic practices, the festival links global and local dimensions. During Struer Tracks 5 (14–16 August 2025), the city exemplifies “transnational transitions”:

international artists work alongside residents, enabling local stories to gain worldwide resonance. Borgerservice for Listening by Bureau for Listening converts the municipal Citizen Service into a "civic listening" desk at which visitors explore the political power of attentive hearing. The street-based, app-driven performance You're Not Alone plays a line from the 1990s hit whenever two app users cross paths, transcending invisible networks of people and technologies. In the interactive performance Sonic Driving, participants' heart-beats are transformed into low-frequency sound and assembled into a collective "cardiosymphony," generating a bodily sense of connectedness.

Themes of identity and inclusion resonate across museum and urban sites. Advantages of Being Dyslexic, housed at Struer Museum, gathers more than eighty stories from Danes with dyslexia, presenting neurodiversity as a resource. In the Town Hall, Qallunaaq (Dansker) intertwines Greenlandic and Danish cultural threads. In the waters of Kurbadet Limfjorden, bath-robed visitors immerse themselves in Liquid Narratives via underwater loudspeakers that broadcast the voices of local communities alongside those of the artists, turning the spa centre into a shared listening space.

The educational strand encompasses the Good Praxis Workshop, where participants collectively explore ways to "desire the world differently" in the face of the climate crisis. Additionally, Noise Research Union offers diagrammatic scores for collaborative investigations of noise. Students of the Sounding City Summer School will present their urban soundscape studies in a final exhibition at the Town Hall. Operating in parallel with professional platforms, these formats foster horizontal networks of knowledge exchange across generations and disciplines.

Scheduled for 15 August, the Sound & Art Annual Meeting gathers artists, curators and researchers for lectures and a joint tour of the installations. Two days earlier, on 13 August, the Danish Sound Cluster will host a seminar on sound in urban planning, while the National Centre for Sonic Cultural Heritage will convene the international conference Exploring Sonic Cultural Heritage. Struer Tracks thus becomes a hub for nationwide and cross-sector exchange.

Programmes for children and families receive particular attention. The festival opens with BRAGET, a large-scale event in which schoolchildren, shanty choirs and residents collectively "sound" the square in front of the Town Hall, setting the tone for three days of communal listening. Daily free guided tours are offered, while on 16 August family routes and tin-can-telephone workshops invite participants to explore the power of trusting conversation. A dedicated School Programme by Lydlaboratoriet supplies teaching materials and bookable

excursions. Dialogue around care and coexistence continues between events as audiences and artists share vegan dinners in the Community Kitchen.

Threading the weekend together is Festival Radio. Produced by The Lake Radio, this programme employs a mobile studio that roams the city broadcasting interviews, live performances and reports. In this way Struer's residents move from being listeners to becoming co-hosts of Denmark's on-air "common room."

By inserting deliberate instability into its own infrastructure, Struer Tracks 2025 operates as what Esche (2005) calls a *space of democratic deviance*: a slowly woven sonic mesh whose nodes range from harbour to schoolyard, turning the small Danish town into a laboratory for civic imagination. Artistic practice supplies a mechanism of limited autonomy, enabling residents — co-authoring with artists — to test alternative modes of publicity. Crucially, this autonomy is not outside institutional or capitalist logics; it arises at their seams. The biennial is financed through a dedicated municipal grant from Struer Kommune and national foundations such as Statens Kunstfond, Augustinus Fonden, Art Music Denmark, William Demant Fonden and Ny Carlsbergfondet. These arrangements keep Struer Tracks answerable to city officials while allowing it to foreground themes that mainstream cultural policy often overlooks—more-than-human ecologies, neurodiversity and contested identities.

Earlier analysis of the festival's ambiguous position inside the municipal structure directly informed curator Jacob Eriksen when devising the fifth edition (14–16 August 2025). He chose the twin-titled theme Kommunal Praksis (Communal Practice), exploiting the single-letter shift from *k* to *c* to juxtapose state bureaucracy with collective activity (J. Eriksen, personal communication, 14 March 2025). *Kommunal praksis* usually evokes the municipality's everyday paperwork — renewing driving licences, issuing permits — whereas *communal practice* suggests grassroots collaboration. By letting the two notions "feed each other", Eriksen proposes recasting municipal governance as a service to heterogeneous inhabitants — "animals, insects, fields, plants, rocks, waters, politics, infrastructures …"— rather than to "the system" itself (ibid.). *Kommunal praksis is the practice of gluing all this together*, he insists, a living organism in ceaseless exchange with the wider world.

The theme also serves as a mirror: because Struer Tracks is municipally run, it is physically embedded in town administration. Eriksen describes *Kommunal Praksis* as a "self-reflective, double-sided" concept that asks, 'What is it we are actually doing in municipalities?' (ibid.). Yet self-observation alone would be dull: the festival therefore projects the idea outward, expanding it through a spectrum of communal artistic practices.

Social-global questions surface first. Communities feel safe yet draw boundaries; inside the EU mobility is easy, but "if you come in from outside, you need a lot of paperwork" (ibid. 5). Administrative practice thus unites and divides simultaneously. To "stretch the system", Struer Tracks has teamed with MINU and Klang (DK) and Another Sky (UK) to create a residency for artists from SWANA (South-West Asia & North Africa) so that two practitioners can realise new works in Struer.

The festival also folds in the more-than-human. Set beside Limfjorden, Struer is treated as a multispecies community of water, wildlife and plants. Works such as *Liquid Narratives* (Kurbadet Limfjorden, 14 Aug 14:00–21:00) bathe spa-goers in underwater voices of both locals and artists, literally immersing listeners in an expanded ecology (Struer Tracks, 2025).

Joint action underpins the programme. Rejecting the "star-artist/passive-audience" template, Eriksen invites many lesser-known participants — "unknown, but that is okay" — trusting that collaboration with residents will spark "great stuff" (J. Eriksen, personal communication, 14 March 2025). A single, non-overlapping running order lets everyone — artists, locals, visitors — share each piece in real time, forging the dense, durational attention Bishop (2021) prescribes as an antidote to the bottomless feed of OS XXI.

Concrete manifestations abound. *Borgerservice for Listening* turns the municipal Citizen Service into a "civic listening" desk; *You're Not Alone* plays a hook from the 1990s hit whenever two app-users cross paths, revealing hidden sociotechnical networks; *Sonic Driving* fuses participants' heart-beats into a low-frequency "cardiosymphony", giving bodies an audible form of belonging (Sound Art Lab, 2025).

Byvandring, an hour-long opera walk devised by Operaen i Midten, leads small groups out of Struer Bibliotek and through six everyday sites, where fleeting sung tableaux crack the anonymity of streets and shops; the piece re-imagines urban navigation itself as a communal vocal score. New media strata accumulate through three curator-led film programmes and through Julie Østengaard's participatory film-performance Slug Barbie Show — Regelbau 411's irreverent contribution that splices body horror with karaoke to inject late-night Struer with anarchic humour. Parallel knowledge platforms amplify this reflexivity. The National Centre for Sonic Cultural Heritage convenes the conference Exploring Sonic Cultural Heritage, while the Sound & Art Annual Meeting gathers artists, curators and researchers before folding back into a long-table dinner and evening performances in Bang & Olufsen's Cube — a choreography that lets intellectual exchange slide seamlessly into collective embodiment (Sound Art Lab, 2025). Inclusive strands run throughout the festival. For example, BRAGET "sounds" the Town Hall square with schoolchildren, shanty

choirs and residents, setting the tone for three days of communal listening. Daily guided walks culminate in family routes and tin-can telephone workshops that show how trust can be built through play. Lydlaboratoriet's school packs and bookable excursions ensure that learning is not just an add-on but the backbone of the event. Between art events, vegan community suppers extend conversations about care and coexistence beyond formal time slots. Festival Radio — a roving studio — weaves together these micro-scenes, turning residents from listeners into co-hosts of a city-wide "common room." Even the communal dinner — scheduled with nothing else in parallel — slows the festival's pulse, tapping the Danish practice of fællesspisning while echoing the lineage from Tiravanija's 1990s cook-ins to present food-based social practices. Taken together, these interlaced formats show how a municipally embedded biennial can lever, stretch and occasionally subvert kommunal praksis, expanding who and what counts as a community not through monumental gestures but through choreographed acts of listening, co-making and shared sustenance that retune civic space in real time.

The choice of the theme *Kommunal Praksis* at this particular juncture is no accident: it follows both the internal logic of the festival's growth and wider contextual pressures. Locally, the fifth edition of the biennial marks a milestone—a chance to look back and critically assess the path the institution has traced. Jacob Eriksen notes that by 2025 Struer Tracks will have been staged five times, so 'it also feels like a good time to come together' (J. Eriksen, personal communication, 14 March 2025), to gather and summarise the accumulated experience.

Eriksen characterises his curatorial method as a perpetual heuristic search: 'A curator must keep on working curiously towards finding artists, practices and artworks that they did not know before' (J. Eriksen, personal communication, 14 March 2025). The artist pool is compiled well before any public announcement, informed by field observation at festivals, studio visits, personal recommendations and—crucially—graduates of the Sound Art Lab residency. Moreover, sometimes projects are conceived in situ: for instance, Maryia Kamarova and Kunrad spent several weeks in Struer in summer 2024, so their pieces return to the present biennial as integral elements of the local soundscape. During production the artists retain maximal autonomy over site and format, while the curator acts mainly as mediator — a sparring partner — thus giving concrete form to the relational curatorial model theorised by Terry Smith and Hans Ulrich Obrist.

In private conversation Eriksen identifies an additional, informal yet operational filter: the 'niceness of the artists' (J. Eriksen, personal communication, 14 March 2025). My own five-week residency at Sound Art Lab corroborates his intuition that a supportive affective climate accelerates collaboration. Yet precisely here Claire Bishop's (2006) caveat becomes

pivotal. When social utility or correct conduct is elevated to the principal metric of value, the critical–formal standards by which art interrogates itself can slip into the background. Surveying the ascent of socially engaged practice, Bishop argues that under the banner of social inclusion every collective gesture risks being declared successful in advance: 'there can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works of participatory art, because all are equally essential to the task of strengthening the social bond' (p. 3). She locates the same logic in New Labour policy, where 'social inclusion' operates as a technocratic panacea—art is asked to compensate for exclusion by staging inclusion (p. 3). Such ethical primacy, Bishop warns, produces a covert hierarchy in which 'the binary of active/passive forms an allegory of inequality' (p. 15); accordingly, 'good intentions should not render this art immune to critical analysis' (p. 17).

Sarah Ahmed (2008) extends this critique through the concept of compulsory happiness. In The Politics of Good Feeling she writes: 'Happiness becomes here like glue; we need to glue communities back together through happiness' (p. 1). Those who foreground racism or other structural injuries are swiftly branded kill-joys: 'The feminist is an affect alien for sure: she might even kill joy precisely because she refuses to share an orientation towards certain things as being good' (p. 6). Ahmed underlines the generativity of discomfort, urging us to 'be willing to be attributed as the cause of unhappiness … and put whiteness into trouble' (pp. 10, 13).

Taken together, Bishop's and Ahmed's interventions illuminate a blind spot in the rhetoric of niceness: the very mood that oils co-operation can also neutralise critique and silence the already vulnerable. For a curator who wields the power to assemble publics, the task is therefore double: to foster generous working conditions while remaining vigilant that affective consensus does not harden into an exclusionary norm that leaves the least protected voices without a place from which to speak.

Struer Tracks demonstrates that a biennial framed as a "complex singularity" can operationalise both sides of the global template: recognisable enough to unlock funding and mobility, yet sufficiently self-reflective to remain accountable to its locale. On the one hand, the festival reproduces core attributes of the post-Havana model mapped in §4.1: a compressed three-day cycle combines exhibition, discourse, education and urban intervention; its artist residency and partnership network mirror the "laboratory" ethos that once distinguished Havana from Venice. On the other hand, by rooting the 2025 programme in Kommunal Praksis, Struer Tracks turns the administrative machinery that normally underwrites cultural branding into both medium and message, thereby generating what Esche (2005) calls an immanent

deviation capable of "interrupting normal flow". In effect, the biennial functions as a municipal prototype in which compliance with rules (venues, tenders, safeguarding) becomes the very condition for redistributing symbolic and material resources to otherwise under-represented actors: schoolchildren, SWANA artists, neurodiverse citizens and non-human ecologies.

This dual orientation allows the festival to answer the four hypotheses advanced at the start of Chapter 4. By embedding participation deep in municipal services, it broadens the circle of agents; by de-centring star power in favour of collaboratively conceived works, it prunes elitism; by staging research platforms, alongside informal dinner debates, it deepens discourse; and by performing its own bureaucratic constraints on stage, it offers a reflexive case of parrhesiastic practice without retreating into safe coded dissent.

The Almanac extends the very curatorial logic traced through this chapter. The biennial lends its name and platform, yet leaves the editorial process entirely in our hands: no approval rounds, no imposed themes, no rearranging of pages "for coherence". In effect, Struer Tracks spawns a micro-structure inside itself whose only remit is to observe, reflect and, when necessary, question the host event in real time.

That arrangement crystallises the chapter's argument. If Struer Tracks shows how a municipally embedded biennial can create pockets of autonomy while remaining inside kommunal praksis, the Almanac demonstrates the same principle one level down: a structure within a structure that mobilises institutional visibility without submitting to institutional control.

Chapter 5 will follow the Almanac from first pitch to final launch, tracking how distributed authorship, weak resistance and immanent critique translate into the everyday practices of writing, layout and peer review.

5 Embodied Editing: Curating an Almanac

This chapter engages with two key theoretical sources — Salomé Voegelin's essay Uncurating Sound and Donna Haraway's article Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective (1988). The former provides the curatorial framework for the decisions made throughout the creation of the almanac, while the analysis of Haraway's work shapes the methodology of writing and positionality.

In her essay, Donna Haraway describes how feminist studies fell into a trap. She opens with a self-ironic admission: "We have used a lot of toxic ink and trees processed into paper decrying what they have meant and how it hurts us" (Haraway, 1988, p. 575). Over decades, feminist critique has produced an impressive corpus of literature that meticulously exposes "a kind of invisible conspiracy of masculinist scientists and philosophers replete with grants and laboratories" (Haraway, 1988, p. 575). Yet this image, however grounded in actual structures of power, simultaneously reinforces a 'they/we' distance and discreetly sustains the bodiless authority on which classical objectivity rests: those in power remain unseen precisely because they present themselves as a "gaze from nowhere" (Haraway, 1988, p. 581).

Accordingly, the more the critical discourse around the 'White Capitalist Patriarchy' developed, the more the political roots of "objective" knowledge were confirmed. This phenomenon also made it gradually easier to slide into cynical relativism, which Haraway viewed as yet another way of being nowhere while pretending to be everywhere; like totalisation, it is the same 'god trick'.

Haraway articulates the position of scientific knowledge aphoristically: "History is a story Western culture buffs tell each other; science is a contestable text and a power field; the content is the form. Period." (Haraway, 1988, p. 577). If everything is reduced to a play of discourse, how can the right to speak about material reality be preserved? The author voices her anxiety: "So much for those of us who would still like to talk about reality with more confidence than we allow to the Christian Right when they discuss the Second Coming…" (Haraway, 1988, p. 577). In other words, how can reality be discussed critically without sliding into "everything is just text"? To escape this trap, Haraway proposes the practice of embodied objectivity. At its core, it is the recognition of the researcher's bodily local position; no "view from nowhere". Only "particular and specific embodiment" can generate "faithful accounts of a real world" (Haraway, 1988, p. 580). Hence her famous formula: "Only partial perspective promises objective vision" (Haraway, 1988, p. 583). Objectivity is not abolished but redefined

as a networked connection of many limited perspectives. This leads to what Haraway calls ‘successor science’ — a post-critical science that remains open to revision yet resists relativism. Its ethic is passionate detachment: simultaneous engagement and critical distance. Its methodology is translation and relationality: “sciences of interpretation, translation, stuttering, and the partly understood” (Haraway, 1988, p. 590).

Haraway therefore not only urges that existing power relations in science — physical, natural, social, political, biological, and human — not be ignored, she also insists on restoring body and vision to scientific practice. “Vision can be good for avoiding binary oppositions” (Haraway, 1988, p. 581). The body returns not only to those in positions of power, but also to those who are oppressed: “there is good reason to believe vision is better from below the brilliant space platforms of the powerful” (Haraway, 1988, p. 583).While, lacking vast resources does indeed make it harder to fall into the illusion of universality, epistemological value brings responsibility. Haraway emphasises that “The standpoints of the subjugated are not ‘innocent’ positions” (Haraway, 1988, p. 584); nevertheless, they “are preferred because, in principle, they are least likely to allow [the] denial of the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge” (Haraway, 1988, p. 584). Those with fewer privileges “are knowledgeable of modes of denial through repression, forgetting, and disappearing acts — ways of being nowhere while claiming to see comprehensively”, and thus they have “a decent chance to be on to the god trick and all its dazzling — and, therefore, blinding — illuminations” (Haraway, 1988, p. 584).

In this way, Haraway offers a new vision of knowledge in which the subject’s embodiment and the object’s agency become conditions of veracity. Feminist thought thereby escapes the trap of disembodied ‘pure text’, instead joining a ‘non-innocent conversation’ with a trickster world that always responds unexpectedly, but is therefore worth listening to.

Guided by Haraway’s methodological principles, this thesis constructs its argument deductively: from a macro-perspective to a bodily-personal level. The first chapter outlines the conditions of contemporaneity that shape curatorial practice and transform the biennial format; the second examines Struer Tracks and its curatorial logic, thereby establishing the festival coordinates of the almanac. The final shift of focus rests on the authorial position and bodily dimension: through self-reflection the motives and consequences of the key decisions made during the project’s development are analysed.

During the development of the Almanac, I organised the work into three interrelated phases: (1) conception, in which I articulated the project’s premise, chose its title and carried out the initial brainstorming; (2) acquisition and curation, focused on soliciting submissions,

securing grant funding, and refining the publication's editorial logic; and (3) production and dissemination, covering design, copy-editing, website development, and the planning of future promotion.

5.1 Conceptual Groundwork

The process began with a two-part question: why publish an almanac now? and why employ that particular term? While interning at SAL, I was asked to review 643 residency applications submitted through an open call, as well as to draft the concept for the future edition of the Struer Tracks biennial. As I sifted through the proposals, I became keenly aware of the institution's limited resources; only two artists could be invited, as SAL plans to cover each resident's grant, travel, and accommodation.

Reflecting on the theme Kommunal Praksis, which implies wider participation and the creation of situational communities, I began to explore ways of democratising the biennial without increasing the budget. During feedback sessions with Jacob Eriksen, four potential avenues emerged for broadening the festival's reach: 1) a collaboration with the local cinema to screen short films about sound 2) a staff-exchange scheme with other sound-art biennials 3) a professional conference involving students, and 4) a multi-author publication.

It soon became apparent that several of these initiatives were already under way, whereas the idea of a jubilee publication still lacked a dedicated curator. An almanac was deemed the optimal format, as it could, with minimal financial outlay, blend scholarly essays, interviews, scores, and visual materials, thereby enlarging the biennial's audience. Investigation of suitable publishing models became the point of departure for the subsequent stages; which will be traced in detail throughout the subsequent sections of this chapter.

Similarly to the evolution of biennial formats, the very understanding of which texts may accompany an art event has also changed. As discussed in previous chapters, the exhibition in its contemporary sense is a relatively recent phenomenon, and the profession of the curator is even younger; therefore, the main turning-points in the literary accompaniment of exhibitions can be traced with relative clarity.

The history of exhibition publications shows a gradual progression — from concise explication, to canon-building manifesto, to an autonomous artistic medium. During the seventeenth century, the livret of the Paris Salon served as a pure inventory: number, artist, sometimes medium. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, the livrets included jury regulations and brief biographies, turning the list into an instrument of canonisation (McClellan, 1994). Then during the second half of the nineteenth century, mass phototype

printing gave rise to the illustrated catalogue; a case in point is The Art Journal (1899), where reproductions of exhibition "highlights" were published in advance, fixing a post-memory of the event (The Art Journal, 1899).

A crucial rupture occurs in inter-war America. A first of its kind, the catalogue The Lillie P. Bliss Collection (MoMA, 1934) combined full-colour reproductions, attendance statistics and a curatorial essay, declaring the printed book a manifesto of museum policy. An even more normative effect was produced by Alfred H. Barr Jr.'s project Cubism and Abstract Art (1936). As Susan Noyes Platt notes, "Cubism and Abstract Art, together with the widespread dissemination of its influential catalogue, established Cubism as the central issue of early modernism, abstraction as the goal" (Platt, 1988, p. 284). The catalogue presented Cubism as a "completed history" and thereby removed it from its social and political context, turning it into a formalist benchmark.

Barr made his thesis visually explicit through a genealogical diagram — "an apparently absolutely systematic version of the development of Cubism" (Platt, 1988, p. 284). He distinguished geometrical from non-geometrical abstract art, defining modernism as a shift from realism to abstraction. In the catalogue's foreword Barr states that "the dominant interest was almost exactly the opposite… [artists] were driven to abandon the imitation of natural appearances" (Barr, 1936, as cited in Platt, 1988, p. 289), thereby consolidating the opposition "abstraction versus mimesis" as the driving contradiction of modernism. It is important to stress that Barr's model was not only a historical reconstruction but also a reaction to the political crisis of the 1930s: the rise of abstraction was linked to ideas of freedom and progress against the backdrop of strengthening totalitarian regimes (Platt, 1988, p. 292). In an American context, this rhetoric became the cultural capital of the Cold War, and the equation of abstraction equals freedom, an ideological cliché. Contemporary critics, notably Meyer Schapiro, quickly pointed out the limitations of such an evolutionary model, emphasising the problematics of stylistic autonomy (Platt, 1988, p. 291). The 1920s movement Neue Sachlichkeit, for example, fell outside Barr's system because its artists sought to counter the advance of formalism and abstract art, seeking to perceive things as they really are, without idealisation or romanticism, thereby confronting the world with eyes wide open to all its horrors. Thus the catalogue became a tool of power — what Joseph Grigely would later call an exhibition prosthetic, printed and sonic "prostheses" (press release, audio guide) that extends the exhibition while simultaneously exposing institutional authority (Grigely, 2010).

As the aftermass of the Second World War reduced the cost of full-colour offset printing, catalogues became a mass commodity; their print-runs numbered tens of thousands.

The text became a public arena for critics, curators, and artists to debate the deeper meanings behind an exhibition. 1960s conceptualists radically re-thought the catalogue as an autonomous artistic object: Ed Ruscha printed Twentysix Gasoline Stations (1963) in an edition of four hundred without any vernissage, showing that a reader could "walk through" an exhibition simply by turning pages. The audio cassette Audio Arts (William Furlong, 1973–2004) voiced the idea of a "sound catalogue", while digital repositories such as Met Publications transformed printed "finals" into continuously updated databases. The next radical gesture was Seth Siegelaub's "magazine exhibition": a forty-eight-page issue of Studio International (July/August 1970) in which the curator "gave six critics to edit an eight-page section of the magazine, and in turn, to make available their section to the artist(s) that interest them". The project not only delegated editorial functions but also turned an international journal into a multilingual exhibition platform, foreshadowing the digital collaborations of the twenty-first century.

Today, when working on any exhibition publication, an editor inevitably positions it within the three established models: 1) the explication that documents works (like the Salon livret), 2) the canonising manifesto that constructs a hierarchy of styles (Barr's catalogue Cubism and Abstract Art; Barr, 1936), and 3) the autonomous medium that itself becomes an exhibition (Siegelaub, 1970). Any contemporary catalogue necessarily situates itself within this system, where the text may either reinforce institutional authority or consciously dissolve it by admitting multiple voices.

The almanac seeks to maintain this balance: it deliberately eschews the role of a "catalogue-commentary" and exists alongside, rather than subordinate to, the biennial At the same time, the editorial gesture is reduced to minimal intervention in the discourse — limiting it to what the inevitable responsibility for the publication's final form allows. The next chapter provides a more detailed explanation of the motives and consequences of choosing the title Almanac, for it metaphorically communicates a cyclical, non-normative organisation of knowledge, setting itself against both the rigid explication and the hierarchical manifesto.

Almanac — derived from the Arabic word al-manākh, meaning "calendar" or "climate" — originally denoted a compiled register of days, months, and celestial phenomena (Krylov, 2010; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1911). The earliest Latin instance of the word appears in the thirteenth century, when the English Franciscan polymath Roger Bacon used the term in his Opus Majus (1267) to label astronomical tables (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1911). By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the word was adapted in French (almanach) and German (Almanach) for annual calendar books that blended planetary ephemerides with saints'

days and astrological advice (Collier's New Encyclopedia, 1921). Moveable-type printing accelerated their spread: early impressions by Georg von Purbach (c. 1457) and Regiomontanus (1474) demonstrated the commercial value of such handy compilations (Capp, 1979).

During the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the form diverged into elite and popular strands. Official "court" almanacs such as the Almanach Royal (Paris 1679) supplied directories of ceremonies, postal routes, and genealogies. This pattern was soon copied in Prussia, Saxony, and England (Remnek, 1985). Simultaneously, folk almanacs — epitomised by Benjamin Franklin's Poor Richard's Almanack (1732–1758) — swapped court news for moral maxims, anecdotes, and practical household tips. This ultimately turned the medium into a vehicle of vernacular entertainment (Capp, 1979).

The almanac's literary potential crystallised at the close of the Enlightenment. In France Claude-S. Sautreau de Marsy's annual *Almanach des Muses* (1765-1833) offered poets a prestigious showcase, while in Germany Friedrich Schiller's *Musen-Almanach* (1796-1800) gathered new verse by himself, Johann Wolfgang Goethe and their contemporaries (Bogoyavlensky, 1925). By the Romantic era the term could signify a themed anthology of original literature as readily as a factual year-book.

Russia adopted the model with enthusiasm. Nikolay Karamzin's *Aonidy* (1796) is usually cited as the first Russian literary almanac (Frank, 2012). The 1820s–1830s witnessed an "almanac boom": up to twenty titles a year appeared, among them *Polar Star* (1822-1825) edited by Decembrists Kondraty Ryleev and Alexander Bestuzhev, and *Northern Flowers* (1825-1832) compiled by poet Anton Delvig with contributions from Alexander Pushkin and Vasily Zhukovsky (Remnek, 1985). Pushkin remarked in 1827 that almanacs had become "the representatives of our letters", and later critic Vissarion Belinsky dubbed the 1820s–1830s "the almanac period" of Russian literature (Belinsky, 1844/1953).

Unlike a journal, which implies regular appearance, a Russian *al'manakh* was characteristically non-periodic—most often annual or occasional. The national standard GOST 7.60-2003 still defines an almanac as a collection of literary-artistic or popular-scientific works united by a common feature (Federal Agency on Technical Regulating and Metrology, 2003). The dominance of the form waned after the mid-1830s with the rise of monthly "thick journals" such as *Biblioteka dlya chteniya* (1834) and Pushkin's own *Sovremennik* (1836), which offered authors steadier remuneration and readers continuous supply (Ruud, 1982).

Yet the word retained cultural prestige. At the turn of the twentieth century Symbolist publishers deliberately revived the format: the Moscow house Scorpion re-launched *Northern Flowers* (1901-1911), while St Petersburg's Shipovnik issued lavish *Literary-Artistic*

Almanacs (1907-1917) featuring writers of the *Mir Iskusstva* circle (White, 1992; Terkel, 2017). Realist collectives such as Znanie, led by Maxim Gorky, preferred the plainer label "collection", yet reviewers still described their one-off books as almanacs (White, 1992). In the fractured publishing climate after 1917 many groups again turned to the ad-hoc anthology, confirming the almanac's resilience as a flexible vehicle for collaborative self-expression (Bogoyavlensky, 1925).

Because the term carries this layered history of heterogeneity and independence, choosing Almanac as the title for the hybrid publication accompanying the *Struer Tracks* sound-art biennial is symbolically apposite. First, it signals a poly-genre anthology: like its precursors, the volume can juxtapose interviews, essays and project documentation with creative texts, images and scores (Remnek, 1985; Frank, 2012). Second, in the Russian imagination *al'manakh* evokes experimental freedom and release from strict periodicity, aligning the biennial's edition with a tradition of avant-garde miscellanies (Bogoyavlensky, 1925). Finally, the word resonates internationally: Anglophone readers may think of reference year-books such as *Whitaker's Almanack*, while European and Russian audiences recall Romantic-era literary anthologies, giving the publication cross-cultural intelligibility (Collier's New Encyclopedia, 1921). In short, *Almanac* encapsulates form (multi-author collection), function (documenting an event), and cultural memory (the irregular, experimental anthology), making it an apt and meaning-rich designation for the biennial's companion book.

Thus, naming the publication Almanac already registers an embodied, situated perspective: growing up within the Russian literary field makes the term feel instinctively apt for an irregular, collaborative anthology. At the same time, this cultural inflection is not the sole rationale. The word also foregrounds the book's multi-genre structure, aligns it with a centuries-old European tradition of festival-oriented miscellanies, and remains immediately intelligible to international readers familiar with reference yearbooks.

5.2 Editorial Architecture

The material-collection phase commenced with an open call addressed to artists, curators and scholars working with sound. The objective was first to assemble a wide spectrum of ideas and only thereafter, upon analysing the submissions, to define the eventual form and structure of the Almanac. Although the curatorial team anticipated a primary focus on text-based proposals, the call explicitly rejected any restriction on format, style or orientation (see

Figure 1). In this way the Almanac positioned itself as an inclusive platform, irrespective of institutional affiliation, preferred medium, professional experience or geographical location.

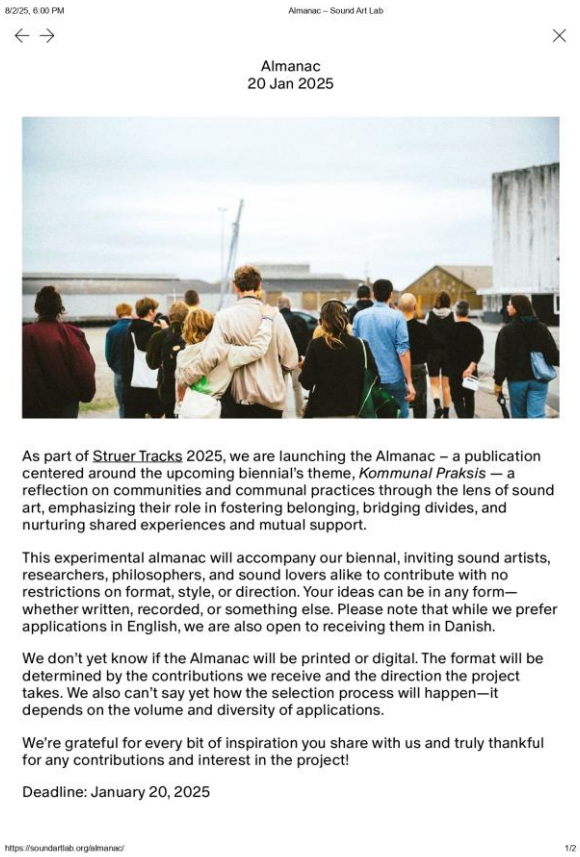

Figure 1

To maximise reach, the announcement was disseminated through several partner networks. The independent space iii (The Hague), Kunstuniversität Linz and the Brussels collective Q-O2 circulated the invitation via their communication channels. Because no production budget yet existed, participation had to be voluntary; the sole thematic constraint concerned the biennial's framework *Kommunal Praksis*, a requirement intended both to anchor contributions in the festival discourse and to include voices unable to attend the event in person.

During the two-month submission window, eighty-eight project outlines were received and fifty-four were subsequently developed into full proposals. Of these, twenty-eight took a purely textual form, whereas nineteen combined text with audio or visual elements. The distribution of formats prompted reflection on how the Almanac might integrate all contributors while at the same time limiting curatorial authority to the essential tasks of editing and mediation.

Concurrently with the open call, a search was undertaken for funding programmes that would accept applications from individual curators as well as organisations and that were open

to non-EU residents holding an Erasmus residence permit. An initial survey identified three potential funders: the Nordic Culture Fund, the Danish Arts Foundation and Creative Europe – Culture. Practical advice obtained from Jacob Eriksen indicated that the administrative demands of the Creative Europe scheme would exceed available resources; attention therefore shifted to the remaining two options.

Applications were submitted to the Danish Arts Foundation's programme *Craft and Design Projects in Denmark and Abroad* and to the Nordic Culture Fund's *Globus Opstart+*. Both schemes allow individual applicants and explicitly support printed publications. Although neither proposal was successful, subsequent notification from the Danish Composers' Society confirmed that *Sound Art Lab* had secured a grant earmarked for the *Almanac*, thereby establishing a production budget and enabling a printed edition in addition to the planned digital version.

By late March, when funding had been confirmed and most final submissions received (the deadline having been extended from 1 February to 1 March), editorial review determined that the Almanac should appear in dual formats. A web platform would host the full set of accepted projects, including all mixed-media works, whereas the print volume would comprise exclusively text-based contributions — interviews, articles and essays. Excluding mixed-media pieces from the printed version responded both to budgetary constraints and to practical considerations: embedding audio tracks, video links or interactive elements would have required readers continually to consult external QR codes, diminishing the usability of the book. Designating the website as the primary repository thus allowed the inclusion of nearly all proposals (one submission, whose focus lay outside sound, was declined) and provided a coherent means of presenting the diverse material generated by the open call.

Thus, the following task arose: to understand which submissions would be included in the printed collection, which criteria I, as curator, would rely on when selecting them, and how I would determine the order of the texts. For this I drew primarily on Salomé Voegelin's *Uncurating Sound: Knowledge with Voice and Hand* (2023). Opening her prologue with self-reflection, she asks how, and from what position, the book is to be written. In the scholarly tradition, she notes, there are established formats, rules of proof, a language of critique, references to recognised sources: "Scholarly writing has an infrastructure and an institutional design that draws lines and sets a tone, which as register organises and validates knowledge, its presentation and form." (S. Voeglin, 2023, p. viii). It is precisely this 'infrastructure', or "language game", as Lyotard might call it, that shapes the permissible modes of utterance. To be recognised, a text must speak in the correct tone, with the correct citations, and conform to

the expected format. Salomé questions such a scheme and offers an alternative: writing that proceeds not from evidence but from corporeal, subjective, lived experience. She writes: “To write beside the lines, to evoke a different register, and eschew evidence in favour of narration and contingent experience, creates disorder.” (ibid., p. viii).

Thus, in working with the text, she is multilayered, multiple, speaking from herself and in the present. This writing is not evidence but interaction; not an interpretation of meaning but its materialisation through words, through sound, through togetherness. Salomé’s self-reflection also touches on the question of her own woman’s voice, traditionally excluded from the canon: “What is my place if I am a woman? I look for myself throughout the centuries and don’t see myself anywhere.” (ibid., p. ix). She refers to Cixous and Clément’s *The Newly Born Woman* to show that the history of knowledge is a history of exclusions. Those whose voices do not fit into the ‘line’ of academic discourse become invisible. Voegelin’s solution is to abandon the desire to “fit in” and to begin writing off-centre, creating disorder, multiplicity, ellipsis. Such a text is unfinished, unstable, not singular. It demands co-participation. Speaking of her work she writes: “Such a book provides no one message. No clear conclusion can be drawn. Instead, it performs its own presence that generates a disorder of connections and does not say what things mean but makes them mean by materializing them through words beside and with each other as plural voices in incongruence but never in contradiction.” (ibid., p. ix).

Her book does not tell what things mean; it proposes being *with* — reading as an act of presence, not of comprehension but of lived experience. Writing becomes a performance, a bodily gesture, open to dialogue, to resonance. Thus she warns that *Uncurating Sound* is not merely a manifesto but an experimental form of writing in which what matters is not what is said but what sounds between the lines: in the pauses, in the rhythm, in the corporeality of reading and writing.

In the second part of the prologue Voegelin writes of the paradox of such a task: “How do I unform a book, its writing, its structure; the frame of reference and the voice of legitimacy, and still write a book?” (ibid., p. x). Here she states that her aim is not the destruction of writing as such but the refusal of its hierarchical, linear, disciplinary foundations. She seeks a form of writing that does not assert knowledge but becomes an experience of participation: “Such a book provides no one message. No clear conclusion can be drawn.” (ibid., p. x). To write is not a means of delivering a “message” but a way of being, sounding, materialising in the present. Meaning here is not declared; it emerges in the process of reading, in the touching of voices, in the shared breathing of the text: “…makes them mean by materializing them through words beside and with each other…” (ibid., p. x). She emphasises that this process may appear

chaotic, tautological, senseless—like the sounds she makes while sliding across uneven cobblestones. But it is precisely here that instruction ends and conversation begins: not an exchange of assertions but a mutual becoming, participation, attunement (ibid., p. xi). The body becomes the source of the truth of writing: "The rigour of such writing… has to be found on the body. The body thinking, writing, reading out loud, performing words…" (ibid., p. xi). In this way her view intersects with what Haraway called an "embodied objectivity". Such writing cannot be finished or fixed—it must be performed again and again, like a refrain that does not repeat but each time creates a new layer of meaning: "I write a text that does not produce a theoretical voice, that I cannot lean on… but that I need to perform again and again…" (ibid., p. xi).

Thus, writing refuses the idea of completion, thereby resisting the capitalist logic of becoming a "product" that must be "consumed". Speaking of academic writing, Voegelin, like Haraway, also mentions…

Voegelin makes an important clarification: her task is not merely to add another feminist voice or to affirm personal experience as universal. She uses the autobiographical voice as a strategy, not to affirm the "I" as a stable essence, but to reveal the multiple positions from which the "I" can speak, contrasting this with the language of theorists whose "I" hides behind the third person, speaking on behalf of the institution and "universal truth", devoid of body: "The 'I' of writing in conventional language forgets to ask this question and does not indulge in the dizzy disorientation of its repetitive chant. Instead, it hides any lingering doubt about its own position in the third person." (ibid., p. xii). Language demands neutrality, impersonality, and precisely this limits experience. Voegelin asks: whose "I" counts? Whom does it exclude?

So that an open form does not collapse into chaos, Voegelin proposes "reminders and scores" — small rituals that do not create a new rigid matrix but merely keep the space mobile: "To succeed in building such an open institution and keep its disorder, we might need regular reminders and useful scores to practise lingering and dancing, to keep the urge for control and the violence of the line at bay…" (ibid., p. xv). Thus, in working with texts, the gesture itself matters: not erecting a new structure but constantly remembering what has been renounced — the straight line, the power of form, the standard. This is not a destruction for its own sake but a continuous corporeal-artistic practice of presence.

Voegelin pushes this argument still further when she declares that "by the time that theory, language and philosophy have arrived at the post-normal, practice would already have been there. Theory lags. It always comes when the body has already moved" (Voegelin, 2023,

p. 92). Because writing necessarily arrives belatedly, it cannot claim the neutral vantage traditionally associated with scholarly authority; its very syntax already vibrates with affective attachments and omissions. In her words, “theory does not write arguments but critical fictions” (Voegelin, 2023, p. 93). Citing her own affection for “thinking here with Deleuze” , she exposes citation itself as a selective, even patriarchal, performance of loyalty rather than a guarantee of rigour. Such belatedness obliges theory to relinquish the omniscient pose and to “listen to expand the field of reference into inexhaustibility” (Voegelin, 2023, p. 94), allowing knowledge to emerge through “diffuse combinations rather than straight and parallel lines” (p. 95).

Sound becomes the medium that enables this reorientation. For Voegelin, it is not a rhetorical figure but “a physical logic of knowing” grounded in the fact that “there is no outside of sound… I am always within and participating even in what appears silent and inaudible” (2023, pp. 95-96). Epistemology conducted in and through vibration resists binary taxonomies; it propagates along waves, interferences and resonances that cut across disciplinary borders, making every field a porous, responsive body. The proposal for “transversal sound studies” therefore designates less a new sub-discipline than a mode of scholarly conduct aimed at cultivating what Christa Wolf once called an “unmessbare Größe: die schöpferische Phantasie” – an immeasurable capacity for creative imagination (Wolf, 1987, as cited in Voegelin, 2023, p. 98).

The editorial decisions that shaped this Almanac were guided by that same wave logic, though never without compromise. I retained the sonic grain of each contribution by limiting intervention to orthographic corrections, thereby allowing irregular cadences, code-switching and unresolved tensions to remain audible. The designer received mood boards rather than rigid grids, so that the page could answer the texts instead of disciplining them. The sequence alternates densely argued essays with conversational or performative pieces, producing an undulation that invites the reader to inhale and exhale with the collection. Finally, the trajectory from corporeal breath to communal audition, from more-than-human mythologies to ecological accountability, attempts to enact the expanding wavefront of participation that Voegelin imagines. Whether these strategies succeed in realising her post-normal aspiration remains an open question; nonetheless, they mark a conscious effort to let theory resonate from within practice, rather than arrive after its echoes have faded.

Reading the submitted texts, I mapped them along four invisible trajectories — corporeality, infrastructures of care, sonic mythology and communal futures — yet I kept the headings offstage so that the reader might enter the single “full lung” of discourse rather than

a grid of sections. The almanac's route moves from the personal, material body to communal sounding, then expands to non-human and more-than-human narratives and, through the glitch-trickster Simina Oprescu, returns to ecology and collective care, reminding us of our shared responsibility.

The almanac opens with the body and common breathing: Ronja Svaneborg's performative score *Do I Need to Move My Lips to Be Part of the Choir?* literally enacts Salomé Voegelin's final injunction: "Fill your lungs with as much air as you can. Sing without words until you are out of breath." (Voegelin, 2023, p. XVI).

Drawing on her own bodily experience of the pandemic, Voegelin observes: "The sonic world became smaller. Focused on my own body, my breathing, my movements..." (ibid., p. 2). This thought is taken up in the conversation Yasya Minenkova & Yanis Proshkinas — *Post-Covid Blues*, devoted to the sound of coughing: the text records how the pandemic retuned our perception of sound and intensified our interest in corporeality.

The focus then shifts from individual listening to tactics of care and co-presence. In the metaphorical "culinary" instructions of Rupert Enticknap — *Recipe for Sharing*, sound functions as a recipe for intimacy: the practice of preparing and distributing food together becomes a model of acoustic communality. Next comes Viktor Mazin — *Instrumental Ear*, where the body is viewed as a psycho-acoustic instrument: listening occurs "from within", and a psychoanalytic lens reveals how inner resonances shape our relation to the world.

Thus the first conceptual arc of the *Almanac* leads the reader from breathing and coughing — the most basic sounds of the body—to more complex practices of collective care, where sound becomes a recipe for living together and a tool of self-knowledge.

After the first section has focused on the individual body and its breathing, the second part of the almanac shifts attention to how we listen together — turning aural perception into an ethical, corporeal and often political practice.

This segment opens with the "recipe" manifesto Ariel Orah / Sōydivision — *Sonic and Social Fermentation: The Alchemy of Sound and Intersectionalities*, where sound is described as a starter culture that initiates "social fermentation" and creates new cultures of collective being. Joshua Le Gallienne — *Communal Listening* develops the idea: drawing on queer theory, acoustic ecology and fieldwork, the author shows that listening is always a relational action, shaped by bodies, biases, technologies and the environment.

Next, Yumiao Liang — *Sound Art as Communal Practice* considers sound art as a democratic tool capable of re-stitching fragmented communities and creating spaces of mutual support. In parallel, Bureau for Listening — *Proposals for Listening* offers practical scenarios

in which listening is conceived as civic infrastructure and a right to collective self-government (with a special focus on the city of Struer).

The block concludes with Anne E. Stoner — *Sounding Together*. Drawing on her own participatory project, the author explores how failures, blurred boundaries of authorship and the roles of "artist—participant" become productive points for the emergence of collective knowledge and care. Thus, the second conceptual knot demonstrates that communal listening is an active form of social creativity through which we learn anew to live and act together.

The third conceptual knot unfolds as a succession of sonic rhythms that lead the reader beyond the strictly human. First, Tommaso Nudo guides us into the space of communal rites, where the repetitive sounds of bells, footsteps and voices serve as ritual infrastructure: they gather memory together, resist the erasure of differences and assert the right to multiplicity. Ana Ruiz Valencia continues this wave, translating listening into a mode of "deep time": ghostly echoes of rivers, ancestors and vanished worlds intertwine in a practice of trans-temporal solidarity in which the boundaries of species and epochs grow fluid.

The sonic flow then becomes technologically heterogeneous: in Sabina Oțelea, folk incantations and the whisper of spirits meet algorithmic voices, forming a new digital mythology in which AI becomes another inhabitant of the auditory field. Elena Chadaeva slows the tempo to a continuous drone: monotone humming opens a threshold between life and oblivion, turning listening into a meditation on presence and absence.

Finally, in Simina Oprescu's text the figure of the Trickster bursts in—a sonic trick-player who deliberately introduces glitch, turning the narrative inside out and reminding us that every steady rhythm always already contains the possibility of sudden rupture.

The final "exhalation" opens with the almanac's only Danish-language piece — Robin Frederiksen's essay *Takt & Tone*, once again bringing in an effect of interruption and "stumbling". This is followed by Bea Lamar's work, which explores mutual aid as an acoustic, ecological and affective practice: drawing on the aftermath of the Californian wildfires, the author links fungal communications, community resistance and sonic trauma, proposing mutual aid as an embodied response to systemic collapse, where sound functions simultaneously "as a signal and as infrastructure—a modus of care and co-presence". The section closes with Sarah Damai Hoogman's essay *When the Earth Shifts: An eco-sonic narrative from the Arctic*, in which climate change is heard through ice, silence and field recordings, forming an "eco-sonic" story of the Arctic and inviting us to listen to the planet in its movement.

In shaping the internal order of the *Almanac* I was guided not only by thematic trajectories but also by the stylistic pulsation of the texts. The balance between genres — conversation, interview, essay, academic article — was conceived as a rhythmic figure responding to the metaphor of breathing that underlies *Uncurating Sound*. Dense research papers alternate with "lighter" forms, creating a kind of inhalation–exhalation that holds the reader's attention while protecting the collection from monotony. After the main body of texts comes my dialogue with curator and Sound Art Lab director Jacob Eriksen, which, albeit briefly, reveals the bodily dimension of the Struer Tracks institution itself.

As Voegelin notes, genuine legitimacy in writing arises when one manages to "hear an order that remains unordered and undisciplined; that is contingent and provisional, a negotiation of resources, asymmetries, (mis)understandings, coincidences, bodies, materials and things and that finds legitimacy in performance" (Voegelin, 2023, p. xvi). Guided by this principle, I arranged the *Almanac* so that no single text claimed a solitary "conclusion", and the whole array of materials formed a situation of shared presence. The task was to preserve the field's mobility: here sound functions as a modus of care and co-presence, and reading itself becomes an extension of breathing, where meaning is constituted in the interstices between bodies, in pauses and noises.

5.3 Making Public

The final printed version of the Almanac was completed under extremely tight deadlines, and special credit is due to copy editor Mohamed Hamad. In just one month he meticulously reviewed every submission in Google Docs' "suggesting" mode, limiting changes to typos and punctuation errors. By returning the drafts with a covering letter that framed all edits as recommendations, he ensured that each author's unique voice, rhythm, and grammar remained intact.

The printed edition's visual design followed the same "minimal-intervention" philosophy. Each contributor completed a brief detailing their wishes for the designer, Linn Henrichson, who then made the final decisions drawing on the mood boards and curatorial notes I prepared for each section. The finished layout of the printed Almanac is reproduced in the appendix to this dissertation.

Jonathan Heneis (circlelabs) leads the technical development of the digital Almanac: he designed the front-end architecture and built a bespoke Google-Docs-driven CMS. I oversee all editorial content and its curation — shaping the page structure, coordinating updates with

authors, and maintaining the Google Docs database. Finally, the landing page features visual elements created by designer Tanya Prystavka and reproduced here with her permission.

Stylistically, the site deliberately avoids copying the interfaces of Struer Tracks or Sound Art Lab; instead it establishes its own visual identity while maintaining continuity through the shared colour palette and typefaces used by both institutions. This balance underscores the *Almanac*'s autonomy yet visually links it to the Sound Art Lab ecosystem.

The profile that emerges from the current cohort of contributors to the digital almanac is one of broad, outward-looking continuity rather than rupture with Struer's existing sound-art ecology. The roster encompasses Bea Lamar (Lebanon), Boryeon Choi (Republic of Korea), Mark Waldron-Hyden (Ireland), Kunrad (Netherlands), Hannah Rumstedt (Germany), Viktor Mazin (Russia), Anne Stoner (United States), Lucy Cathcart Fröden (United Kingdom/Sweden), Mohsin Shafi (Pakistan), Samantha Lippett (United Kingdom/Finland), Bonnie Han Jones (Korean-American), Meta Golova — Lena Kilina (Russia) and Carlos Issa (Brazil), Daphne von Schrader (Austria), Daria Orlova (Russia), Joshua Le Gallienne (United Kingdom), Tommaso Nudo (Italy), Elena Chadaeva (Netherlands), Madelief Lammers (Netherlands), Anne Louise Kershaw (United Kingdom), Rita Ferreira (Portugal), Kate In (United States), Fernando Feria (Mexico), Jody Servon (United States), Rupert Enticknap (United Kingdom), Benjamin Meamo III (Philippines), Ana Ruiz Valencia (Colombia), Marie Tirard (France), Catherine Dionne Ashley (United States), Carolina Caldeira (Portugal/Denmark), Jun Suzuki (Japan), HighPitchMagazine (international collective), Timjune Tianjun Li (China), Letizia Artioli (Italy), Camille Frazier (United States), Zlata Zh (Austria), Wait and Hear (interdisciplinary group), Ariel William Orah (Indonesia/Germany), Simina Oprescu (Romania), João de Nóbrega Pupo (Portugal), Sabina Otelea (Romania), Tricia Enns (Canada), Bureau for Listening (international collective), Yumiao Liang (China), Vieni Fortuna (Italy), Nino Davadze (Georgia), Yasya Minenkova (Lithuania) and Yanis Proshkinas (Lithuania), Sarah Hoogman (Netherlands), Olga Zubova (Russia), HHEENNRRII (Brazil), Ronja Svaneborg (Denmark), Robin Frederiksen (Denmark), Lizaveta Berkutova (United Kingdom) and Maxim Frolov (United Kingdom). A systematic reading of posts on the Sound Art Lab and Struer Tracks Instagram feeds, cross-checked through web searches pairing each artist's name with the two organisations, reveals that only a small fraction — roughly one in eight — can be documented as having taken part in a residency, live performance, workshop or exhibition physically hosted in Struer. The confirmed cases include Kunrad's residency-derived installation later selected for the 2025 biennial, the Bureau for Listening collective's forthcoming commission for that same edition, Ariel William Orah's invited lecture-

performance, Joshua Le Gallienne's contribution to the online strand of Sound Art Lab's "Wait and Hear" programme, Rupert Enticknap's guest performance during the 2024 winter season, the Wait and Hear project itself and Simina Oprescu's year-long residency in 2023–24. Even when borderline instances—artists announced for future programmes yet to be archived—are added, the proportion with verifiable on-site experience never exceeds fifteen per cent.

Crucially, the statistical skew towards artists who have yet to work on site — forty-seven out of the fifty-four contributors — should not be mistaken for estrangement from Struer's institutional sphere. Digital traces show that many of these ostensibly "remote" participants already subscribe to the laboratory's and the biennial's channels, circulate their open calls and comment on peers' residency updates. In this respect the almanac does not chart an external constellation but inhabits the extended curatorial perimeter of Sound Art Lab and Struer Tracks: a permeable zone where ideas and interlocutors coalesce before material commitments become possible. For practitioners unable to be physically present, publication in this volume provides an alternative point of entry into the biennial's conversation, while for the organisers it doubles as a discreet recruitment conduit. Several contributors testify that their first sustained encounter with Sound Art Lab arose through preparing work for the almanac and that they now intend to submit residency applications. The publication thus occupies a productive middle ground, functioning both as a provisional community for distant participants and as a channel capable of guiding fresh voices towards future on-site collaboration.

Geographically, the contributors cluster most densely in Europe, with notable concentrations in the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands and the Nordic region. North America and Asia form two secondary poles: artists based in the United States, Canada, Pakistan, China, Japan and both Koreas appear throughout the volume. Latin-American representation is thinner but present, arriving via Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and the Philippines. At present the volume includes no contributions from Africa or Oceania. In the African case this absence reflects a purely procedural contingency: several proposals were indeed received at the preliminary stage, yet their authors ultimately did not submit a final version for publication. One may therefore expect that, as future calls are issued and those conversations resume, the geographic balance will move gradually towards greater parity.

Seen in this light, the almanac acts less as an external challenger than as an expanded field of resonance for Struer's ongoing programmes. Roughly seven of its fifty-plus participants already possess first-hand experience of the city's studios, galleries or public spaces; the remainder constitute a reservoir of potential collaborators whose acquaintance with Struer has so far been mediated by screens, streams and feeds — but who, in several

documented cases, discovered the very existence of Sound Art Lab through the pages of this volume. Rather than staging a contrast between "inside" and "outside", the publication visualises a gradient of involvement that stretches from confirmed residency alumni through newly informed sympathisers to attentive but as-yet uninvited peers. Its significance, then, lies not in demonstrating distance from Sound Art Lab and Struer Tracks, but in revealing how far the institutions' digital reach has travelled — how many artists stand poised to close that final, physical gap — and how the almanac itself enlarges the curatorial perimeter, opening space for divergence, experimentation and future convergence in Struer.

The dissemination programme rests on three complementary vectors. First, the publication will be presented and distributed during the Sound Art Lab Biennale and subsequently at specialist book fairs devoted to sound art. Second, printed and digital copies will be sent directly to institutional partners and colleagues in the sound-art community, broadening the project's professional visibility. Third, copies will be deposited with Struer Library and the Royal Library of Denmark (Copenhagen) for archival storage and long-term scholarly access.

The preceding discussion has shown that the Almanac translates Donna Haraway's ethics of "partial perspective" into editorial praxis while pursuing the experiential aesthetic sketched by Salomé Voegelin. A fully public open call, followed by a deliberately light-touch copy-editing protocol in which all changes remained suggestions, preserved each author's idiom, cadence and analytical framing; thus the volume performs a negotiated polyphony rather than an authoritative line. The content was subsequently articulated along four clandestine trajectories — corporeality, infrastructures of care, sonic mythology and communal futures — whose sequencing generates the inhalation–exhalation rhythm identified earlier in the chapter and keeps meaning mobile, arising in the pauses, overlaps and dissonances between voices. In so doing, sound is activated less as topic than as relational technology, a modus of co-presence that aligns with Voegelin's insistence on writing "beside the lines". The resulting assemblage — a modest print run mirrored by an extensible, database-driven website — occupies the productive interval between catalogue and autonomous artwork: it extends the biennial's reach without reinscribing institutional hierarchy, yet avoids the trap of indiscriminate relativism by making its curatorial standpoint explicit and accountable. By exchanging exhaustive control for strategic minimalism, and definitive conclusions for contingent relationalities, the Almanac offers a replicable model for small- and mid-scale cultural platforms seeking to amplify marginal perspectives under limited budgets while remaining affectively entangled with the worlds they chronicle.

Conclusion

By the time I arrived in Europe I was already experiencing marked fatigue: the effort of applying for a master's programme, the visa and other bureaucratic rituals, the rupture with my former employment and attendant financial uncertainty, and the wider political turbulence together constituted the point of departure for this research-led placement. From the first day of my residency at Sound Art Lab I therefore kept two tasks in mind. First, I sought to understand how Almanac might evolve into a genuinely *communal* practice — one capable of extending the festival beyond the perimeter of the host institution. Second, in the Harawayan sense of *situated knowledge*, I aimed to register *where*, *how* and *why* I was acting, interrogating my own methods, blind spots, privileges and vulnerabilities as a tired yet still inquisitive curator-student inhabiting several border positions.

My answers took shape at the crossroads of Slavoj Žižek's sombre diagnoses of systemic deadlocks and the invitation issued by Édouard Glissant in conversation with Hans-Ulrich Obrist to abandon a continental mode of thought. They were further nourished by Chrostowska's capacity to "learn to desire", tempered by the cautions of Simon Sheikh, Nicolas Bourriaud, Ayesha Hameed and Donna Haraway. Equally formative were the internship itself — ongoing conversations with artists at SAL — and Jacob Eriksen's course on curatorial approaches and his gentle guidance. Almanac functioned as a rolling feedback loop itself: during calls and email exchanges I asked contributors how they preferred to work, what might be improved and whom else we should invite.

Curatorial practice today represents a problematic terrain in which two tendencies converge: the drive to *remove* the curator in response to critiques of an authoritarian figure, and the epidemic of curator burnout. Salomé Voegelin (2023) observes both extremes. Drawing on Lina Džuverović and Irene Revell's *The Bling and the Bullshit of the Art Dump: the Sick and Tired Curato*', she describes the structural violence of the profession and the figure of the young, institutionally unprotected curator compelled to 'burn out' almost for free in order to appear valuable: "One's value lies in one's willingness to bring these gems of ideas and funding like religious offerings to institutions whose operational structures are based precisely on sucking out this kind of enthusiasm for as long as possible" (Džuverović & Revell, as cited in Voegelin, 2023, p. 7).

Simply excising the curator, however, does not abolish power; it merely transfers it to the artist or to the exhibitionary form itself. Analysing *The Dark Pool* (Cardiff & Miller, 2009),

Voegelin notes that the dim lighting and insistent soundscape 'silence dissent' and script the visitor's trajectory: "I too am installed in the work, as a moving part… choreographing my viewing and listening possibility" (Voegelin, 2023, p. 12). The refusal of a curator thus appears democratic, yet violence is merely disguised, converting the spectator's body into an instrument. Bonaventure Ndikung terms this *un-caring* — care for oneself at the cost of care for the other (Voegelin, 2023, p. 13). Following Foucault, Voegelin insists that art can never be entirely *uncurated*; the exhibition space remains an arena of power, only redistributed.

In response she advocates a shift from administrative control towards what Haraway calls *response-ability* — a freedom inextricably bound to ethics and the capacity to respond: "Freedom as inextricably linked to responsibility and ethics… an ecology of practice that cultivates a collective from the ability to respond' (Voegelin, 2023, p. 18). This logic entails the gesture of *going slow* — resisting the neoliberal tempo of production: "To cure the sickness of curation we can hold a space for not doing, for slowing down, for care and solidarity" (Voegelin, 2023, p. 19). Slowness here is not a matter of clock time but of materiality, depth and togetherness — of refusing the finished object in favour of a process of 'gardening & digging': 'The work might refuse representation and singular authorship and instead favour collaborative "digging and gardening"' (p. 20). Such a practice is paradoxically more demanding; it calls for attentiveness to the unfinished and the invisible, becoming a meeting point where material unfolds 'in complex relationality rather than in proof' (p. 21).

Voegelin names this *care-full curating*, where art becomes a process of solidarity and sovereignty is conceived as accountability to the other. Care must remain visible and function as resistance to systems that exploit enthusiasm, youth and precarity. This, in turn, gestures towards a renewed democracy grounded in attentiveness, plurality and the capacity to respond. Throughout my work on Almanac I endeavoured to place *responsibility* at the centre of my curatorial approach. The conclusion now examines to what extent each of the four initial hypotheses – on participation, elitism, discourse, and reflexivity – has been realized. These hypotheses guided the evaluation of whether the hybrid Almanac functions as a communal practice in Struer Tracks 2025. Below is a summary of the project's outcomes, highlighting its key achievements and limitations.

This thesis was structured around four operationalised hypotheses — participation, elitism, discourse and reflexivity — in order to test whether a one-off hybrid Almanac could function as a communal practice within Struer Tracks 2025. The results, summarised below, highlight both the achievements and the shortfalls of the project.

The Almanac succeeded in broadening participation, reducing elitism, and diversifying discourse. In effect, it became an "open door" – welcoming not only sound artists but also students, philosophers, curators, and independent enthusiasts. The project truly "accepted everyone": every submission was included, except for one whose topic lay entirely outside sound. As a result, the institutional threshold for participation was significantly lowered, the range of contributors widened, and the discourse around Kommunal Praksis was both broadened and deepened by this new platform.

However, not all ambitions were realised to the hoped-for depth. Limited time and resources meant that a truly "go-slow," deeply collaborative approach (in Voegelin's sense of slow curating) could not be fully implemented. Even a five-week residency in Struer – with many discussions, interviews, and work at SAL – led to a mostly intuitive engagement with the Lab's methods, rather than a thorough, analytical evaluation. Furthermore, the contributor base remained predominantly European and North American. Broadening the geographical diversity to include regions like Africa or Oceania is still an unrealised goal – although the project did significantly lower other barriers to entry.

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Attachments

The digital version of the almanac is available at https://almanac.struertracks.dk/, and the printed version is attached as a separate file.

Conversation with Jacob Eriksen

Below is a conversation between Jacob Eriksen, director of Sound Art Lab and curator of Struer Tracks, and myself — Zlata, intern-turned-Almanac curator.

Join us as we discuss how and why *Kommunal Praksis* drives this year's biennial, while also sharing a brief look behind the scenes of the festival's work.

Zlata: What is the concept behind this year's Struer Tracks? How did it come to be and why did you choose it now?

Jacob: There are so many good answers to that question. If we first of all look at *communal practice* and *Kommunal Praksis*, there is this wordplay between the Scandinavian way of understanding *Kommunal Praksis* as something very bureaucratic on the one hand. Like, when you need to renew your driver's license, or get a certificate, or if you want to add an extra structure to your house — then you go into this bureaucratic system of the municipality. That is often known as *kommunal praksis* in Danish as well as in other Scandinavian languages. On the other hand, when we say *communal practice* in English — it does not refer to bureaucracy at all. I think the English equivalent to *kommunal praksis* would be *public administration practice*, or something like that. I don't know the exact term, but it does not really matter that much as the two terms are almost the same — it's just a "k" in Danish, and a "c" in English — that makes all the difference. Two terms that are nevertheless completely different, but they could feed into each other. Or at least *communal practice* could feed into *kommunal praksis*, in the sense that we start to understand *kommunal praksis*, or public administration practice, as something we actually do for a collective group of people who are only bound together by living in the same geographic area within politically defined borders. The concept for Struer Tracks is not so much addressed towards the public administration, it is instead a humorous pathway into serious topics revolving around how we can open up perspectives of being together in many different ways, and more or less voluntarily, as we are in Struer municipality and in this world. Kommunal praksis should not be for the sake of the system, for the state — it should be for the inhabitants which collectively constitute an environment of individuals, families, groups and associations, companies and businesses, animals, insects, fields, plants, rocks, waters, politics, infrastructures, healthcare,

farming, production, education, leisure, and entertainment. Kommunal praksis is the practice of glueing all this together through public administration but also through *communal practice* where we understand the societal environment not as a machine with set rigid rules that apply to everything, but as a living organism that is always changing in relation to the rest of the world. This organism needs to be kneaded, shaped, and formed from within by which it also shapes itself.

Since Struer Tracks is a festival, a biennial, organised by the municipality and taking place in the municipality of Struer, I think it would be great, as a curator, to have this kind of self-reflective double sided concept of Kommunal Praksis/Communal Practice. One that is not just about the municipality itself, and not just self-reflective in the sense of looking at our own belly buttons, but rather an expanded self-reflection — like, *what is this that we are actually doing in municipalities?*

Being situated in a municipality, in a public administration system — as a festival, as a Sound Art Lab, as an artist residency or working environment for sound art — is a bit weird. *We* feel weird, and I mean that in a very positive sense. We feel weird about being within the realm of *kommunal praksis*, of public administration. This also has its strengths. The weirdness is that it's quirky, it's funny. At the same time it can also be a burden. We really have to follow some rules. Then again also opens doors — to direct help from the rest of the municipality, contact with other groups within or outside of the public administrative system.

The topic of kommunal praksis thus becomes a self-reflective term for the municipality, for us within the municipality, us as the festival, us as Sound Art Lab — it is a great exercise to do.

Of course, it is not so interesting to go to a festival that is just reflecting on its own situation. We want to expand the term through a lot of different artistic practices that are communal in one way or another. I think that is the very perspective coming from Sound Art Lab, from Struer Tracks, from *within*.

Then there is a bigger perspective — a societal, global perspective — of community as something like a group where you belong. That is both something like a safe place, but it is also maybe something that creates a border where others cannot enter.

Zlata: What does that do? Or could there be other communal practices that transcend borders and groups?

Jacob: Borders can be anything — from country borders to, let's say, the sailing club. They have their borders. And the young car enthusiasts — they have their borders.

They stay in groups, but only within their group. And then they go home, and then they are also in other groups. And they are connected through family members, and friends, and colleagues, and so on.

Some families have relatives in France, or in the United States, or in South Africa. And suddenly, there is a community, or there is a connection. And it is cut off by community rules or border rules. You can meet one person from the sailing club, and one person from the car enthusiast group. They have a connection through the cuttings of borders in other groups. And you can have this communal perspective on so many levels.

I think those are... well, we would see the communal element as something positive, something that we do to each other, do with each other.

But we also face difficulties doing stuff — travel, being able to work elsewhere than your own, like, within your own state borders, or your friends' countries, and so on. Like, within the EU, it is fairly easy to move around. But if you want to go elsewhere, or if you come in from outside the EU, then you need a lot of paperwork. Again, some public administration work — to be part of the community, and so on.

So that whole geopolitical aspect of the communal practices — I think it's very, very interesting to see how we, as a festival, can address that. Both within the artworks themselves — but not necessarily only there. It could be a question of how we can collaborate with other festivals in other countries.

For example, we have two artists from the so-called SWANA region — Southwest Asia and North Africa — which is also a disputed area. There are many different understandings of what countries are included in that community, *if* we can even call it a community — the SWANA community.

The question becomes: how can we get funding from Danish art institutions to invite people from a place where it is normally more difficult to invite someone from? It is about trying to break out of our own bubble and saying, *"okay, we need to look somewhere else"*. And one of those directions could be the SWANA region.

Therefore we teamed up — three festivals: Struer Tracks, Minu Festival, and Klang Festival — together with Another Sky Festival in London, who are specialised in SWANA artists.

Editor's note: As part of this collaboration, Struer Tracks, Minu Festival, and Klang Festival — together with Another Sky Festival in London and supported by Art Music Denmark — launched a residency programme for artists from the SWANA region (Southwest Asia and North Africa). Two selected artists will take part in a paid three-month

residency at Sound Art Lab in Struer, Denmark, where they will develop new works to be later presented at one of the partner festivals.

How can we curate an open call? How can we curate the selection? And how do we go by with this? How can we stay within the system but still stretch the system?

We are going beyond convenience, because the most convenient thing would be to invite someone from Sweden, invite someone from Germany — inexpensive travel, no bureaucracy needed, and so on.

But there are a lot of factors when inviting someone from Lebanon or Egypt, as the case will be here. So how can we stretch within that kind of administrative — public administrative — practice, so we can expand our own community?

There is that perspective, but then also: how can we see the human being as part of the world? In relation to, for example, what is sometimes called the more-than-human. That could be the waters that we are surrounded by — hence Struer. That could be the wildlife, the plants, animals, and so on. What is the relationship between humans and the rest of the world? And of course, that is not a new topic. But putting it into the context of this — I think it is a nice way to include it in the communal practice topic.

I also think the last perspective worth mentioning now is the idea of doing it together as a communal practice, which is way less abstract or like highbrow or heady. Doing it together, as in doing jam sessions, or making people meet — not saying that this is the artist-star, or the star artist, the big name, and this is the audience — but saying that, okay, we invite some people to do art. Most of them, most people have not heard about it. But that is okay. We know, we guarantee through our curation that great stuff will happen. And we hope that people will engage with that and be part of it.

We structure the whole festival so that it is possible to take part in everything. There are not several parallel tracks running at the same time and you miss half or two-thirds of the program. But you can, if you are energised enough, follow everything. We eat together — also like that, doing that together. Struer Tracks is not just about attending art shows together, it is something that is performed together, but also those very human needs of eating together — social needs. Eating together will be a key component of the curated program.

Zlata: So why now?

Jacob: I think it can be relevant for all times, but also now.

Zlata: Yes, and it feels like the topic of borders — and everything surrounding it — is becoming more and more urgent for more and more people. And with this being the fifth edition of Struer Tracks, it also feels like a good time to actually look back and reflect a bit.

Jacob: Yeah, it will be the fifth time we have Struer Tracks. So it also feels like a good time to come together.

Zlata: Yeah. For me, it was also a good reminder. In my experience, bureaucracy in general is just pure evil. And this was my first interaction in Europe where I felt that, "*okay*, the government can actually do something positive — you can 'trust' it, in some way".

In my experience, collaborating on projects with a municipality for example, usually entails constantly fighting. So the topic was a good reminder that it can be different. At some point, I think that becomes a big problem — when you live in a structure where you do not believe in cooperation, you become passive. You stop taking action because you already know it will only be met with resistance. And the thing is, you can never have the same amount of resources as when you are working with the municipality or within a public structure. That is why I think it offers a lot of space for reflection — about how to keep that balance and see both the problems and the good things that can come out of it. I think that is really important.

My next question — since we have been talking about people, your structure, and maybe how the biennial has worked in the past — how do you feel about the way communication with the city is going now? And do you have any expectations for how it might develop this time, or how it usually works in general?

Jacob: I had only attended one edition of Struer Tracks before I came to Struer. I went to visit Struer Tracks as part of a full international conference in Aalborg. We were going in buses to spend and afternoon experiencing the biennial. And that was eye-opening — to experience high-quality international art, sound art, happening in a small town in Denmark. I was very positive about that.

It was in 2019, which would have been the second edition. The first three editions were, as far as I was informed, stretched over two to three weeks of programming, including kids' programs and performances, with a very strong focus on the exhibitions — so installations that you could come and visit throughout the two- to three-week duration of the program.

Whereas I had heard something like, okay, arriving at Struer on a Tuesday afternoon in the middle of a biennial and not feeling like there was a festival atmosphere was maybe a bit disappointing — dispite the artworks being amazing. I found that a shame. I was also thinking, okay, for the fourth edition in 2023, it would be nice to have a more dense festival atmosphere.

So we shortened it down to become five days of condensed programming — and that seemed to work very well. All the artists stayed, those who could. And also some of the audiences, especially local audiences, really enjoyed it and attended as much as possible. We got really good feedback. So I saw that, okay, that was a success somehow.

Another thing that was also a success was that we had some food trucks and a pop-up cafeteria, where we also held some performances. You could buy a cup of coffee, or a beer, or something to eat, and talk with each other, and then go into the exhibitions or attend performances. And that worked very well. That was kind of a meeting point. I wanted to make that even better for this year's edition.

So... yeah. What did not work with the 2023 edition was that the artists were not eating together, because there were not any planned time slots for that. So I wanted to change that. Now, we have planned time slots for lunch and dinner, where we will eat together, and there will be no performances during those time slots, to create this kind of family feeling.

Let’s say we will be the artists plus the Struer Tracks team, and the professionals visiting, and so on — like a core group of maybe 50 people, always eating together, going to everything together. And then also including the rest of the visitors. It can really strengthen connections within the festival — and hopefully build a kind of micro-community that can then expand to other festivals. The big wish for any festival is that their artists get booked for something else because of their festival. And that people return to the festival to get more of the warmth they experienced the first time they came and attended.

I also wanted to bring that very much into play.

Zlata: How do you know if the biennial worked? I think you partly answered that already... but do you have some kind of metric for success?

Jacob: When does it work locally?

Zlata: Yes.

Jacob: That is when you can present something that is, by the art professionals, regarded as high quality — but at the same time not scaring away the non-trained audience, who might just be curious about something they had never experienced before.

The worst scenario — if we could take that first — would be that there is a curious local audience who comes, and then they get scared away. The best-case scenario would be that they dare. They have this little curiosity, they dare to show up to something that does not normally happen.

Struer Tracks takes place every second year and this year will then be the fifth. It is not everyone living in Struer who has even heard about Struer Tracks. It is not easy to attract the

local audience, but if just some locals would think *I'm not really sure what it is, but I'll give it a try* and then they go home thinking *okay, this is something wonderful and completely unexpected.* That is a measurement for success.

Zlata: Do you think that people are usually curious about sound art biennials?

Jacob: I'm sure that most people do not know what a biennial is — or what sound art is for that matter. So, no — because they do not know. They have not even heard about it. That being said, I am not sure, actually. Because when you do not know something, then why should you be curious?

We have a job to do there — to communicate it. So everyone can awaken their curiosity. I guess, because of the whole "City of Sound" slogan and all that, then — *okay, there is a sound art festival, a biennial, I'll try to see what it is. Okay, it is close to where I live. Or it is down in the shopping street. Okay, no problem. I can go down there. And if it is not for me, then I can buy an ice cream or whatever. Hang out.*

Zlata: So how are artists selected for the biennial?

Jacob: Well, the curator has a job, and that is to stay curious, stay curating. There might be some — I do not know if there is — connection between the words *curating* and *curious.* A curator must keep on working curiously towards finding artists, practices and artworks that they did not know before, and then putting it in the pool of the stuff that the curator knows already. Then developing the topic, and how the artists and their works would fit into the topic. Considering in what different ways can we think about the topics presented in artworks and in different constellations?

My experience is that most artists, maybe especially sound artists, seem easy to contact, to get in touch with and propose something to. There is something about sound art as a niche genre that makes the community lovely to work with. Most of the artists I contacted were very positive about coming to Struer Tracks and said yes immediately. And others, they were too busy with other works and had to decline, which is also totally fair.

Traveling a bit around to other festivals, making studio visits, and so on — speaking to artists throughout the years leading up to planning the program — is an important part of the process. But I also wanted to include people who have been through Sound Art Lab. There is a real connection with Sound Art Lab as a residency — where people are producing something, so what has been produced at Sound Art Lab might also be exhibited at Struer Tracks. The artist might be international — from a Danish perspective — but actually, what they have been creating, they have been doing very locally in Struer. That is, for example, the case with Maryia Komarova and Kunrad, who stayed for several weeks in the summer of 2024, and worked on

an installation or performance — or whatever shape it will be in the end. They will come back and present that.

Zlata: I was also thinking of using that question to highlight the situation with the open call for the Sound Art Lab residency. There were so many amazing applications, a lot of great ones. But I wanted to touch on the limitations involved. Sometimes artists get rejected not because their work is not strong, but simply because there are constraints — limited space, time, or other resources like budget.

Jacob: That is true. And we have not done an open call for Struer Tracks — other than the Almanac, of course. But... yeah, open calls are difficult. They are great because you can really get in touch with a lot of artists, you can read their proposals, and there is so much good stuff happening out there. But you are limited to picking only a few. And that is a difficult task — to reject a lot of really good artists and really good proposals.

I already had way too many people I wanted to include in the program, so I did not find it necessary to have an open call to artists for Struer Tracks.

Also, a lot of artists proactively write about whether they can participate in Struer Tracks with a performance or an installation. And... yeah, I can not remember if anyone is actually — there may be a few, actually — in the program, but mainly not. I think that is more the case if you are, like, playing at a club or venue — then that is the way to go.

But sure, you can always try, and it is always good to reach out and get connected. Sometimes it is also just the perfect match — and then of course you will be included.

Zlata: Can you talk about your experience working in different roles — as a sound artist, an art director, and a curator? How do these roles develop alongside each other, and in what ways do they overlap or influence one another?

Jacob: I have my own artistic practice, and I guess a lot of curators have their own artistic practice. Others do not. But having an artistic practice, and experience of course, means that you have a vocabulary and experience in doing stuff — seeing what is possible, what is maybe not possible, especially when you are reading proposals. But also in the way that you can kind of imagine a program being put together. So I only think it is a strength, in a bigger perspective.

Maybe we could talk about the fact that it is weakening all the different aspects. I am not 100% an artist, I am not 100% curator, I am not 100% director of an institution.

Zlata: But what is *100%*?

Jacob: Yeah, exactly — what is even 100%? It does not add up like that. Fair enough, if you are only doing one of the things — that is not a problem. But saying that you are only *true* if you are doing one thing 100% — I do not really like that.

Zlata: I was also curious about how responsibility differs across your roles. I just wonder if, in your case, those roles come with a sense of responsibility. Like, as an art director, do you ever feel, "This is on me"?

Jacob: So there is a very big responsibility to understand what is happening. You need some good analytic skills to see connections, to see conflicts — potential conflicts — to see different points of interest, and analyse the situation. And then from there, you do you.

So being aware that, okay, this is a festival situated *here* and not *there*. It is situated within *this* history and not *that* history, or *those* wishes. So there are certain things that would be very easy to do, other things that I might be able to do with a bit of fighting, and some things that would be totally a no-go. And that is a big responsibility.

And then, of course, there is the economical and practical responsibility — and so on — that also comes to it — but that is in this more curatorial, abstract responsibility of curating a program. It is a lot of understanding and openness, and a lot of things can go wrong or go as you did not wish for, and then you have to be able to say, okay, I will then do something else, and that will also be very good.

Let's say you find the perfect location for a certain artwork and you imagine how everything will take shape, and then suddenly it is not possible anymore and you have to find another location. That is just what we have to deal with.

And then there is the political factor, as we are part of — and have been granted funds from — the municipality so we have to recognise and honour its wishes. But also to interpret their wishes in a way they had not imagined.

So that is what I think is a very good way to express it — it needs to be taken very seriously. It needs to be translated into something that you, as a professional, can be satisfied with, while also, you know, fitting the frame.

Zlata: Do you think there are any lessons that you could share — maybe something you learned from your personal experiences working in this context?

Jacob: Yes. Well, one thing that I think is really nice — and actually is necessary — is to be thankful for everyone who is involved and to give them credit. And highlight them a bit more than they feel that they might need to be highlighted. Because everyone is a big part of the process.

Being the director, or the curator, or the ‘big-shot artist’ is often seen as one person doing a great job. But basically, it is a whole team. It is a whole organisation. A lot of bits and pieces. I have met a lot of very famous, big-shot artist directors and curators who are not very nice. So being nice to people, giving them credit for the job that they have been doing, does not take away your credit. I wish that would be more common. Not that it is rare, but it could be more common — to be nice and say, “that's really, really good”.

There is a lot of criticism out there. I think it is fair to criticise stuff that needs to be criticised, but there should be more positive gestures. And less ego. Less “I alone have done this great thing”.

I think with social media — like you have Instagram and you have LinkedIn and so on — there is a lot of posting about “me” and “what I have been doing” and “I'm so good,” and so on. Or humble-bragging, which is even worse.

…But anyway, people should post more about other people, and not so much about themselves. Give credit to people you admire — like, “this is really nice, a good job that other people have been doing” — I think that is important.

Zlata: I don’t know why it so often gets so complicated. But maybe it takes a lot of trust for organisations to credit people properly. And somehow, sometimes, things just go weirdly…

Jacob: I think that is a risk that you have to take. It also does not need to be perfect.

Zlata: True.

Jacob: Yeah, well, I think sometimes I also fall into the trap of wanting to do too much. So, what I would love to learn is to say no or be very realistic about tasks and saying, "I can't do that"—being a bit better to myself work-wise. It is just. I get so excited about doing all these great things that we can do here. And most of the time I manage, but often it is also, you know, I'm a bit too busy. I would like to have a calmer workday, but yeah, that is a luxury. And I am not complaining, but yeah.

Zlata: That is a luxury — but there is still a lot of complexity, and it can still be difficult to manage everything that is happening.

…How can we give proper credit to everyone working at Sound Art Lab — for example, through The Almanac?

I mean, yes, having this conversation with you, but there’s also Kristoffer, Isa, Stine, and many others. And then there are probably so many people that I do not even know about.

So I am just wondering — how can we include everyone? What should be done?

Jacob: The easiest way to do it is to just talk about them, mentioning them, including them.

Zlata: Who are the people of Sound Art Lab? And what are they doing?

Jacob: We have you as an intern. And we have Léa, also an intern. We have Thomas, who is also an intern. Kristoffer, our artistic janitor. And I think that is a very nice title — he is an artist, he has a janitor function — so he is an artistic janitor. We have Stine, doing a great job with communication, organising and coordinating within the project "Sound of the Future," but also in Sound Art Lab as a whole — and Struer Tracks, of course. Isa, doing an amazing job with Lydlaboratoriet, an educational program for kids. Doing an amazing job applying for money for Struer Tracks — that is of course a job that needs to be done. And she is writing really good applications and has made sure that we can have a great program.

Then we have all our collaborators — our neighbors in Sound Hub Denmark, Uddannelsesinitiativet i Struer, Bang & Olufsen, Struer Museum, and the National Knowledge Centre for Sonic Cultural Heritage — and, of course, the rest of the municipality. They have all been very helpful.

We have Jørgen in Sound Art Lab's basement, who will also be the technical manager for Struer Tracks. We have all the artists in Sound Art Lab coming in and out and making life great for us and them. …And I am not sure how we can give them all a voice within this dialogue frame, but they are all there — and there are many more.

Zlata: Do you think it is a problem that the sound art community feels so elitist? Should it aim to be more accessible or somehow expanded?

Jacob: Do you think it is elitist? Why?

Zlata: I'm pretty sure about this — contemporary art is elitist in many ways. You often need access to education, not necessarily to understand or feel the art, but to know where to go, what to see, and how to be invited.

Some organisations seem to protect that bubble to maintain a sense of power. And sound art can be even harder for general audiences — it is less visual and often more abstract.

With The Almanac, we try to open it up, get more people involved. But I know I am still mostly speaking within the same community.

In the end, contemporary art is tied to privilege. It is not about survival — it is about having the space to reflect, to choose, to engage. And sound art, maybe even more so.

Jacob: I'm not sure I completely agree with you on that point. I do understand where the perception comes from — the idea that contemporary art is somehow elitist or inaccessible. But that artists live an easy life, simply choosing what to eat, reading, making art, and focusing

solely on their creative work, doesn't reflect the reality for most. I think being an artist is incredibly challenging. Many are struggling — not just financially, but also emotionally and socially — to sustain their practice in a world that often undervalues artistic labour. It's a demanding path that requires constant negotiation between sustaining a basic level of living and always being creative and pushing boundaries.

Zlata: I am not saying artists are not struggling — I know they are, often a lot. What I mean is that the visitors of contemporary art are usually people who already have some level of access.

It is still not something that feels easily accessible to everyone. In Struer for example, I do not think it is always easy for people to understand what is going on. So yeah, artists have their own challenges, but contemporary art still exists within a kind of bubble, in terms of who engages with it…

Jacob: I do not think it should be easy to... It does not *have to* be easy to understand. But I am also not trying to make an understanding of anything. I am trying to make experiences — something that you might understand in a few days, if at all. Or something that gives you another perspective on something that you find normal or commonplace.

In the sense that what artists can do is to shift perspectives. They can address topics in a different way than politicians can. In a different way than journalists can. In a different way than academics can. In a different way than... the baker or the post-delivery person, or the engineer can.

So there is a special role of the artist. It is not more special than the baker — it is just a different role. But it is still special, as the baker is special.

A special role of the artist to... especially within contemporary art, but I would also say that in art in general — to spot these weird ways of perceiving the world and try to transform that into something that others can experience.

If art, in general and presented at Struer Tracks, is easy to understand — or if it is understandable at all — then... like saying, "Okay, I understand this. 100%." Then for me... it might have failed. I am not saying that it *is* failing, but it might have failed. It might have missed the poetry. It does not have the artistic value that is necessary to make that shift … And it can just be a tiny shift, a subtle transformation — like, "Oh, that is odd, but... it makes me think about the world in a different way."

I think it needs to be — what you might call elitist, or unapproachable, or difficult to approach. Because art needs to create change. And that is what seems elitist. But I do not think it is elitist — I think it is necessary.

Zlata: I think the access to that experience is elitist.

Jacob: Yeah, but it is a cultural thing to call it elitist. And some also want to preserve the elitist bubble.

Zlata: That is true. But I also think denying the elitism is, in part, denying my own position. A part of me probably wants to belong to that elite group, even if I don't fully admit it to myself.

I have had the privilege of time and access — I did not have to focus on survival, and that is already a huge advantage. If I ignore that, I am closing my eyes to my own privilege.

So this is something I am constantly questioning: how to live in society, understand my role in the art world, and communicate with people outside of it. Sometimes I think my work is accessible and open — but then I talk to people, and they are like, "What are you even doing?" And I realise how deep in the bubble I am. We are living in parallel realities that do not always meet.

Jacob: Yeah, but I also do not understand the work of people who work with wind turbines, or with farming, or with economics. Because I do not understand their inherent mechanics, they are just other fields. I think the question about privilege is very important, but I do not think that privilege is bad at all. It is how you relate to your own privilege — how you are aware of it. Everyone should be very privileged. You should not be ashamed of a privilege, but you need to address it and say, "Okay, wow, how lucky am I that I can travel to several countries with ease," or, "How lucky am I that I can afford to have a place to live," and so on. Celebrate the privilege and use it for giving other privileges too. But do not be ashamed of it. Privilege is pretty random, accumulated through time, but privilege is not equal value.

Zlata: Yes, I was trying to speak more about awareness. Privilege blindness is real. And honestly, I think many people, including myself, experience that in some way or another.

Jacob: I very much agree. Also just being given life is already a huge privilege, I would say… But it is a big topic.

Zlata: I also have some questions about future plans — like the summer school you are opening, and maybe other projects you are planning for this year? What are the future plans for Sound Art Lab?

Jacob: So Sound Art Lab is still young — three and a half years, approaching the fourth anniversary.

The Sounding City Summer School, which Sound Art Lab does together with Aarhus University and the amazing Marianne Ping Huang, is a great event where students get together

for three weeks in Struer working on interdisciplinary projects all focused around sound and listening. This will take place hopefully for many years.

But our future plan is to to condense all what we are doing into the Sound Art School '89'. The school is not a pure Sound Art Lab project though — it is a collaboration where Sound Art Lab is one of the main partners. The collaboration includes the local organisations working with sound in Struer to form a co-learning community where you can learn through sound art, sound technology, sound product design, sound narratives, sound studies, and so on — and what is it to be a professional sound artist? It is spiced up with contributions from artists in residency at Sound Art Lab, as the school will take place with Sound Art Lab as the host institution.

That will, of course, be a very big part of our coming future, close future. And that is, for me personally, something that I have been hoping could happen here, because the potential for an amazing sound art school is here — building-wise, knowledge-wise, and the vibe is there.

Zlata: That sounds really exciting. I just have one last part — you know, like at the end of an interview when people ask quick questions and get quick answers.

Jacob: Is that a common thing?

Zlata: Yes. So the first one is… what is the best advice you have ever received?

Jacob: Best advice I received? That is a good question. I think I will answer it differently, because I cannot really think of a single advice that pops into my mind. But I think it is important to be aware of your mentors. And they do not have to be your active mentors. It can be persons that you are looking up to, people you are following in some way or the other, and people that you are copying — like copying in a positive sense.

I often do that when I'm in a situation and think, "Okay, what would that person have done here?" I try to follow the example of someone that I see as more experienced than myself — someone who would probably come up with a better solution than I might have.

And that is, of course, advice that I am now giving. But I think you can also see a mentor as an advice-giver. So you — of course, you do not need to answer or to ask the person — but try to answer for yourself: "What would that person have done in this situation?"

Zlata: How would you describe your work in three words?

Jacob: Three words? ...Why three?

I have a mantra — maybe more like a sentence I picked up somewhere. It is: "Excuse me while I deconstruct."

Zlata: Do you have a dream project?

Jacob: A dream project — that should be unrealistic somehow, I guess. Um, like, some daydream project could be to do something completely different.

Um... like, the cliché is to become a gardener.

Zlata: Maybe one day it could become realistic.

Jacob: Could be. I think it might — I do not know… But I think it is good to think that most things are realistic.

Zlata: The last question is — what is the last sound artwork to have left a big impression with you?

Jacob: The last one… I was very happy to experience an installation in Hague by Ioana Vreme Moser, called *Fluid Anatomy*.

It was like a hydro-computer — a computer made of water containers, water channels, plastic pipes, and so on. Maybe it was not traditionally sound art — it was very sculptural — but it had a nice rhythm to it, almost like a kind of breathing.

So that is the last one, I think.

Zlata: Thank you. Do you think we missed something important?

Jacob: Of course.