

**CONSERVING THE INTANGIBLE: STRATEGIES FOR THE
PRESERVATION AND ANALYSIS OF SOUND ART**

(INTERACTIVE AND EXPERIENCE-BASED ART INSTALLATIONS)

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Abstract

The art conservation practice has developed diverse methods to adequately preserve cultural heritage and artworks. However, recent decades of art production, characterized by complex materialities with underlying concepts that shape the identity of the works, challenge these practices. These characteristics are especially true for sound art creations and installations, which become increasingly vulnerable when collected and preserved through a traditional conservation approach.

This research aims to propose methods for integrating data-gathering strategies that focus on capturing viewer's experience into a structured model for the study and conservation of art, serving as a starting point for the development of a hybrid model with a primary focus on preserving sound art installations. This is achieved by integrating information obtained from theoretical, material, and experiential dimensions to enhance the understanding, documentation, exhibition, preservation, and potential reinstallation of complex sound works.

Using both the Decision-making Model for Contemporary Art Conservation and Presentation, a framework designed to guide the analysis, approach, conservation,

restoration, or installation of contemporary art productions, and the art project *Botaniq*, where visitors' experiences were collected as a form of conservation, the research identifies the main obstacles and challenges faced by institutions and collections when preserving, within a traditional conservation framework, experience-based artworks that depend on visitor interaction, such as various expressions of sound art.

Aided by a phenomenological and hermeneutical approach, the research proposes a merging of methods that can aid in understanding and preserving the intangible aspects and essence of the artwork, as reflected in visitors' experiences within the exhibition space. Using the sound biennial, *MOMENTUM 13* in Norway, as a case study to exemplify the complexities that sound artworks have in terms of their conservation, as well as delving into how a platform such as *MOMENTUM* could benefit from the application of the proposed strategies. The study examines whether a hybrid approach, integrating not only theoretical and material analysis but also a reflection over the audience's experiences, can enhance the understanding of sound art installations and facilitate the development of a new model for their analysis, in addition to opening a conversation about the relevance of including data that allows for tapping into the viewers' subjectivity and experience, facilitating a thorough understanding of the work and its integral conservation.

Keywords: Sound art, Sound Installation, Media Arts, Conservation, Documentation, Preservation, Experience, *Botaniq*, Decision-Making, Experience-based, Interpretation, Intangible

Declaration of Authorship

I, **Daniela Merediz Lara**, born on the **3rd of June of 1994** in **Mexico City, Mexico**, 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,
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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, 09. August. 2025

Place, Date


Signature

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INTRODUCTION

Sound artworks, as highly intangible productions, in the sense that generally their essence lies in the experience they create rather than in their physical form, are often analyzed in many institutions through the lens of traditional, profoundly tangible conservation practices. This approach sometimes results in an inadequate take on conservation during the research, preservation, or exhibition process. The foregoing makes conservation tasks complex and confusing, which endangers the integrity of artworks whose authenticity goes beyond their material expressions.

Highly subjective artworks, such as sound installations (which involve substantial experience-creation dynamics), may be doomed to remain locked away in vaults due to a lack of understanding and a tendency to cling to material elements that are not always relevant to the piece.

In this sense, the conservation practice needs to become more flexible and adapt its strategies for the analysis and conservation, resorting to new methods for uncovering and reproducing the elements that constitute the subjective experiences created by the artworks.

This research's **objective** is to *propose ways of integrating data-gathering strategies focused on capturing the viewer's experience into a structured model for the analysis and conservation of art that can become the starting point for the development of a hybrid model focused on the preservation of sound art installations, integrating theoretical, material, and audience-experiential dimensions, in order to enhance the understanding, documentation, exhibition, preservation, and potential reproduction of these complex, ephemeral artworks* by trying to answer the following research questions:

- How can a hybrid approach improve our understanding of sound artworks?
- What kind of knowledge about the work's identity can we gain from gathering viewers' experiential dimensions?
- How can the knowledge gathered be used to formulate a new approach for studying and analyzing interactive sound artworks?

- How can a new model improve the understanding, preservation, archiving, exhibition, and reproduction of complex artworks with ephemeral aspects and experience-based operations?

Under the **hypothesis** that *a hybrid approach, integrating not only theoretical and material analysis but also the audience's experiences, can enhance the understanding of sound art installations and lead to the development of a new model for their analysis, aiding the preservation, exhibition, and reproduction of sound artworks by capturing both their material and experiential dimensions through thorough and integral documentation.*

This research is of relevance to the art conservation discipline, particularly in the context of sound art productions. The hybrid method proposed in this thesis has the potential to modify the way we approach and think about the conservation of sound art installations, enhancing our ability to preserve and exhibit these complex, ephemeral artworks.

The analysis will prompt new ways of thinking and approaching sound art conservation, drawing on the creativity and subjectivity of those experiencing it, with the purpose of integrating diverse strategies into the analysis and decision-making for the exhibition and preservation of sound art installations that are inherently interactive and experience-based, thereby fostering a more comprehensive understanding of these artworks.

To this end, the study will use the 2021 revision of the *Decision-Making Model for Contemporary Art Conservation and Presentation*, created in 2019, to analyze and study contemporary art productions, from data gathering and registration to the implementation and assessment of conservation treatments or installation decisions. This model will serve as the foundational theoretical tool for the research and will be used as a basis for portraying a method of approaching art conservation in contemporary art contexts, aiming to understand the existing strategies proposed for non-traditional art while also situating the proposal within a tested and accepted framework of contemporary art conservation.

Afterward, this method will be juxtaposed with the tools used in Gabriel Vanegas' artistic project *Botaniq*, where various strategies and workshops were conducted to gather data and collect viewers' experiences as a way of preservation through the perspectives of those

visiting and actively engaging with the artworks. Taking inspiration from artistic projects like *Botaniq* and the strategies used to approach conservation from the intangible interactions of the participants with the work, and delving into experience-based conservation from different perspectives and approaches.

At a later stage, ways in which both parties can mutually benefit will be proposed, aiming to better understand and develop new ethical strategies for engaging with and preserving complex sound art productions, starting with data collection and analysis centered on intangible elements and audience experiences.

Finding different ways to analyze and think becomes relevant when facing loss or obsolescence due to rigid thinking. Since no accepted approach in the conservation field allows for such fluidity, the data and analysis obtained from this research could broaden the reflection on engagement with and the study of intangible art forms, such as sound art installations, and facilitate the development of creative conservation methods.

For the analysis, a combination of both theoretical approaches to the study and conservation of artworks will be undertaken at a theoretical level. Focusing on how to apply these strategies to sound art, which is a highly subjective and experience-based art form. By using the structures proposed by the *decision-making model for contemporary art conservation and presentation*, along with the viewers' experience data-gathering strategies from the *Botaniq* art project, the thesis aims to develop a new step or structure for analyzing experience-based works, such as sound art installations.

Botaniq is a key example in highlighting the existing gap in conservation practices related to interactive artworks and experience-based initiatives. The artistic project stands in the middle between art and conservation, proposing the possibility of considering subjectivity and the viewer's reflection as a means of conservation.

The project represents an innovative proposal that could prove helpful in conserving the intangible elements and experiential dimensions that characterize sound artworks, and thus reflecting on elements that would traditionally be overseen.

This text is developed theoretically in conjunction with an extended internship at the *MOMENTUM Biennale* in Norway. The discussion and proposals will be informed by the data and works presented at the biennial events, serving as a case study in the hypothetical plane. It will suggest strategies that could be incorporated into exhibitions and events to establish an alternative conservation approach as the primary focus of the thesis.

MOMENTUM unfolds within the Nordic context, exploring and strengthening the contemporary art scene, serving as a discursive platform for artistic, intellectual, and critical reflection. This year's biennial (*MOMENTUM 13*) is an investigation and celebration of sound and the relationship between Moss's natural and cultural worlds. With several artworks commissioned and created for this event and context, the biennale presents a potential challenge for conserving and reproducing works that could seemingly function just as attached to a specific location.

MOMENTUM 13 is an outstanding platform to showcase sound art in its different formats and possibilities, exploring multiple approaches, formats, and ways to communicate with the world through sound. While the biennial format does not necessarily have conservation as a focus of interest, *MOMENTUM 13* allows the study of a wide variety of sound art productions and thus, an extensive set of problematics and challenges derived from each one of them as holders of unique identities and structures.

The research aims to explore ways in which conservation, in this context, can be possible and flexible enough to allow for the work's potential re-installation in other contexts and spaces.

The worldview proposed for the research is **transformative**, as the study aims to develop strategies based on subjective concepts, utilizing people's experiences to create a structured model from the gathered information. This research aims to transform conservation practice by adding to existing contemporary art conservation methods or developing new strategies to approach and ensure a better chance of conserving *sound art installations*, focusing not only on their materiality but also on the experiences they produce by analyzing them through the subjectivity of those experiencing them.

For this, a **qualitative** approach will be employed to explore and understand experience as a subjective process that can provide valuable insights into the works to be examined. The thesis will explore general information-gathering strategies that can enhance the conservation of sound art experiences and increase the possibilities of ethically preserving ephemeral and subjective installations.

This academic study delves into subjectivity and the viewer's experience, using terms from *phenomenology* that explore consciousness structures from a first-person perspective. Highlighting the importance of intentionality as a central structure of experience, directed toward an object, or in this case, the artwork, which serves as a container of meaning. The study also incorporates terms from *hermeneutics*, since it is the study of interpretation and plays a significant role in meaning creation and interpretation, which becomes especially important when trying to understand and assign value within a subjective experience.

Key Terms

In this section, fundamental terms are defined to aid the understanding while reading through the thesis.

- ***Sound Art.*** “As a term, ‘sound art’ is mainly of value in crediting site- or object-specific works that are not intended as music per se, but is often a catchall for any kind of piece, be it music or an artwork, that experiments with sound” (Licht, 2019).

Some descriptions of sound art focus on the idea of function, still requiring intent and listening, but with a clear connection to significance in a social context (Rudi, 2020).

Sound art is also defined as any form that critically explores the cultural, political, scientific, and/or conceptual dimensions of listening. Becoming not just an auditory experience, but a cultural and social practice that challenges listeners to engage more deeply with the world around them.

- ***Media Art.*** Grau defines New Media Art as art created or mediated through emerging technologies, such as digital, virtual, internet-based, software, biotech, interactive, game, glitch, telematic, etc., which diverge from traditional visual media. These works tend to emphasize immateriality, ephemerality, and interactivity, requiring a new critical perspective to understand the relationship between artist, viewer, and machine (Grau, 2016).

- ***Contemporary Art.*** In the simplest sense, contemporary art refers to the “art of today,” encompassing works created in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. However, the term also extends beyond just a time-based description.

Contemporary art is also defined by its plurality, global scope, and engagement with current social, political, and cultural conditions, often reflecting the complexity, contradictions, and rapid changes of the modern world while not adhering to a specific artistic style (Smith, 2011).

- **Conservation.** It is understood as all activities that aim to safeguard an artwork in an informed and structured manner, including both direct and indirect actions that prevent both its material and intangible deterioration.

- **Preservation.** For the purposes of this paper, the terms "conservation" and "preservation" will be used interchangeably.

- **Restoration.** It is a part of the conservation practices, focused on treatments that aim to preserve through minimal, reversible, and documented intervention methods.

- **Documentation.** Documentation in the museum context refers to all records surrounding the biography of an artwork, including documents related to acquisition, loans, inventories, research, interviews, and registries of previous exhibitions, among others.

- **Archive.** It is considered an active nexus that includes knowledge shaping the identity and continuity of artworks (Hölling, 2018).

- **Significant Properties.** The significant properties are understood as the tangible and intangible qualities of an artwork that are considered constitutive of its identity and essential for the work to be maintained.
 Properties identified as significant or work-defining may change over time and differ depending on the stakeholders involved. The term generally refers to the characteristics or qualities considered essential to the work's identity. Specific properties are deemed significant based on interviews with the artist or the artist's statements. However, heritage institutions can also determine the value of certain qualities according to their cultural or historical relevance (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, 2021).

- ***Identity.*** The identity of an artwork is a term used in contemporary art conservation to refer to a work's unique character; often, the conservator's ethical focus is on minimizing the loss of that identity between different instances of the work.

The term is often used to refer to a singular essence or core, even though there is growing recognition that works of art do not necessarily have a single identity. A work's perceived identity can change over time as its materiality and context evolve, and as the work is presented in new settings, with different materials, across various times and places. An artwork's identity is constructed, performed, and confirmed both through discourse about the work and through its manifestations, which may maintain the illusion of a fixed, stable identity (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, 2021).

- ***Authenticity.*** In this paper, the term "authenticity" is first presented in its historical sense, referring to the originality and integrity that an artwork possesses, which is experienced when in contact with its physical and original form. However, it is understood also as the recognition that a physical object, event, or experience is an instance of a particular work, not a true/false quality; rather, authenticity may admit of degrees" (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, 2021).

- ***Artist intent.*** The terms artist's intent and artist's intention will be used interchangeably to describe the process of coding the work. In a conservation context, the term focuses on understanding the identity of an artwork.

"For the conservation of contemporary art, the 'artist's intent' is reframed as a collaborative process that evolves, as guidelines which are negotiated by the artist together with other stakeholders to determine what elements of a work of art signify and how we are to work towards their continuation (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, 2021)".

- ***Experience.*** It is a phenomenon that occurs constantly, as the interaction of a living creature with its environment and surrounding human and non-human elements is an integral

part of the living process. Experience reframes art as a holistic and lived process rather than a static object (Dewey, 1980).

- ***Interaction.*** It is a dialogue between the viewer and the evolving artwork, fostering an active dialogue with the audience and characterized by its dynamic presence, responding to the audience's actions and evoking reactions from them (Schraffenberger & van der Heide, 2015).

- ***Performativity.*** It refers to art as a dynamic object or representation created and experienced as an event in real-time. Performativity refers to the qualitative aesthetic of experience and meaning-making (Myoo, 2021).

In this paper, performativity refers to the embodied communication that occurs when a participant interacts with the installation. It reflects a dialogue that takes place while confronting and experiencing the aural.

- ***Iteration.*** Iteration refers to the instance or manifestation, considering it as a process of repetition that entails a degree of alteration or slight modification rather than a single example of the work (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, 2021).

- ***Score.*** The score refers to the instructions or notations for a work of art that allow its recreation or reinterpretation any number of times, either by the artist or by another person. Whether it is a visual or an aural work, scores are used to recreate valid or authentic instances of the artwork by following instructions and focusing on selected qualities previously clarified by the artist in the documentation (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, 2021).

- ***Reenactment, reinstallation.*** These terms refer to presenting an iteration of a work of art that has been previously shown. These reiterations depend on available documentation and material from past exhibitions, the artist's intent, and records of the work. These terms are not indicative of the level of involvement of the artist in the said reinstallations, but instead refer to the action of restaging a work or an event that has occurred before (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, 2021).

- ***Situated Listening.*** It is understood in this text as a “practice embedded in specific temporal, political, and material conditions. This approach challenges notions of neutral or disembodied perception, highlighting positionality and entanglement” (Søndergaard & Uvaas, 2025).

METHODOLOGY AND STRUCTURE

This research is situated within the phenomenological and hermeneutical approaches, drawing on terms and ways of understanding the world from these two philosophical currents.

Phenomenology is a philosophical movement that examines human experience, the ways things appear within that experience, and becomes a form of reason's self-discovery in the presence of understandable objects.

The term "phenomenology" is closely linked to the concept of "intentionality." A fundamental principle of this movement is that it considers every act of consciousness, every experience, to be intentional, essentially involving the "consciousness of" or an "experience of" something or other (Sokolowski, 2000).

Phenomenology demonstrates that the mind is a public entity, acting and expressing itself openly, not solely within its own boundaries. Everything exists outwardly. It helps us recover a shared sense of thinking, reasoning, and perception, while also allowing us to reclaim our human condition as agents of truth (Sokolowski, 2000).

This paper also draws on some ideas from hermeneutics, which is the philosophy of interpretation and meaning that seeks to understand human experience, particularly how meaning is constructed through dialogue, history, and context within a broader contextual matrix (Gadamer, 1975). Within this context, where the object is being observed and the observer exists, meaning is produced through its resonance with elements such as subjectivity, cultural conditions, and social factors (Berger, 1999).

This thesis relies on the idea that through the participants' interaction and experience with the artworks, different meanings and values can be identified and assigned, thereby achieving a better understanding of the identity of a work of art through shared thinking and meaning association.

In the context of an art biennial like *MOMENTUM 13*, which deals with some sound artworks commissioned and created based on, and designed for the space surrounding either Gallery

F15 or the Jeløy island, experienced through a practice of situated listening, positioned not only on the physical space but on the cultural, political, and time environment of the moment of listening. Conservation practices are challenged by the complexity of the interaction and experiences produced by the artworks.

The terms borrowed from phenomenology and hermeneutics will help shape the idea of the experience creation and interpretation from the subjectivity of those interacting with the work, as a relevant value in the understanding and identity reinforcement of an artwork, when contemplating its conservation and possible reinstallation in a different context.

The thesis will be divided into four chapters, focusing on different aspects of sound and conservation, and working towards the development of strategies to preserve the participants' experiences and incorporate them as part of the factors considered while developing a conservation strategy.

The first chapter of the thesis will delve into the concept of sound art, and its intangible, ephemeral, and performative characteristics, as well as the idea of experiencing sound as an active relationship with the artworks.

In the second chapter, the focus shifts to the conservation discipline, revisiting terms such as authenticity and ephemerality, and how they are viewed and considered in conservation practice, as well as the challenges the discipline faces regarding sound and concerns about experience-based works.

For the third chapter, the current frameworks for contemporary art will be introduced, using the *decision-making model for contemporary art conservation and presentation as a primary reference*. Then, the artistic project *Botaniq*, which emphasizes conservation through experience, will be presented. Finally, a method for integrating elements and ideas from both strategies will be proposed to gather participants' perspectives.

In the last chapter, *MOMENTUM 13* is introduced, followed by the challenges the biennial presents for conserving the artworks displayed. Then, a hypothetical application of the model using a sound artwork exhibited at MOMENTUM will be demonstrated, concluding with the

potential benefits of incorporating the proposed strategies into an art exhibition that follows this format.

Finally, in the conclusion of this thesis, the findings from this theoretical discussion will be summarized, highlighting both the benefits and drawbacks of applying the proposed strategies as part of everyday sound conservation practices, as well as the potential lines of research that could be explored from this study.

CHAPTER I: *Sound as a Constant*

In this chapter, sound and its process in the artistic realm are discussed, as well as its overall historical relevance and the challenges it faces in its transition to an art form of its own.

The chapter explores sound's positioning in art theory, considering the overwhelming visual culture that has dominated art history for the past centuries.

The chapter examines the materiality, ephemerality, and performativity of sound, concepts that have been recurring themes throughout the history of sound art. It explores these concepts from different perspectives and exposes how dissimilar approaches to materiality and ephemerality are understood within sound art studies.

Then, a discussion about experience occurs, highlighting how it differs for each individual, as interpreted through their subjectivity, while simultaneously revealing a collective experience that defines everyday life and cultural identities.

1.1. From Sound to Sound Art

Sound and life are intrinsically tied together as a cause-and-effect reaction, as a presence that surrounds every living being. However, sound exists beyond life and humanity, encompassing a variety of intentional and non-intentional sounds, which create a tension between the sounds we listen to, the ones we cannot hear, and the ones we purposely ignore.

Throughout Western cultural history, several attempts have been made to categorize sounds into distinct groups. This division has contributed to a cycle in which deep listening and sound analysis are rendered irrelevant or unnecessary, as sound is already confined within specific characteristics.

As Pardo outlines in *The Emergence of Sound Art*, sound is divided into three overarching “cages.” The first involves musical sounds related to music history, focusing on achieving specific standards and avoiding dissonance. As new technologies enabled further experimentation in music and art, the second category, or “cage,” began to emerge with works that aimed to demonstrate that all sounds could be music. Later, in the late 1990s, the term “sound art” emerged, leading to the development of the third category, which consisted of proposals from avant-garde and experimental music, as well as visual art projects that incorporated sound (Pardo, 2017).

This integration of sound into the historical and cultural paradigms that have accompanied human existence and evolution has long been shaped by what is considered musical sounds and the transformation of sonic elements through their rationalization and modification for expressive purposes. Sound and music, therefore, remain deeply entwined in a never-ending, interdependent relationship that has made sound accessible to everyone. However, the extensive study and definition surrounding music and its fundamental role in most people's daily lives have modified our approach to it and, by extension, to sound in general.

John Cage (1973c) observed that the process of listening to music often means not only listening to sounds but also to the relationships between them, according to ideas or preconceptions about them. He advocated for a new way of listening; one that allows sounds

to exist as themselves rather than being shaped by human sentiment or theory (Pardo, 2017). For such a shift to occur, we must engage in active listening and explore ways to modify our approach to sound and how we experience it.

Doing this will alter how we experience the world in relation to sound in artistic expressions and as a constant presence in our lives. Revising traditional listening methods and consciously reconfiguring how sound is approached and perceived can inevitably transform its understanding and experience as an independent entity, separate from the historical and cultural baggage carried by the strict guidelines that define music within its framework, opening up new possibilities for interacting with sound and sound art.

Yet, this raises the central question: what exactly is “sound art”? Many scholars and practitioners have approached and defined sound art in various ways, emphasizing different elements and creating diverse interpretations, which in turn establish new relationships that redefine or expand the term.

Unlike other art movements, sound art is not tied to a specific period, location, or group of artists; in fact, the movement was not named until decades after the creation of the first works, and the term “sound art” was not widely used until the late 1990s. Moreover, even then, while sound art was used to refer to a wide variety of artworks, there was no clear consensus on what sound art truly encompassed (Licht, 2019).

According to Max Neuhaus, “Sound Art seems to be a category which can include anything which has or makes sound and even, in some cases, things which do not.” The term thus encompasses experimental music, noise music, radio art, sound installations, soundscapes, and, in general, any artwork that incorporates sound into its conception (Pardo, 2017).

In *Sound Art Revisited*, Alan Licht proposes two broad categories of sound-related artworks:

- An installed sound environment, defined by the physical and/or acoustic space it occupies.
- A visual artwork that also has sound (Licht, 2019).

While artists tend to resist strict categorization, the definition surrounding sound art, in particular, reflects a lack of agreement or firm consensus over what the term refers to and its scope.

Sound art often refers to site-specific or object-specific works that are created as something other than music. However, it generally encompasses a wide range of productions that experiment with sound, whether made in conjunction with an artwork or music (Licht, 2019). Sound art has, since its origin, resisted rigid and precise definitions, thus favoring the inclusion of diverse and new artistic practices that use sound as a medium of exploration and creation. The openness of the discipline dismantles established boundaries and theoretical frameworks, preventing it from fitting into a precise category for its theoretical study (Pardo, 2017).

This lack of specificity and challenges in defining the scope of sound art is a consequence of the heterogeneity of works produced using sound as a medium and their existence, in many cases, as a search to expand and transform the art world, thereby destroying preconceptions and established categories.

Due to this lack of specificity and definition, sound art confronts several challenges that go beyond its separation from musical practices and analytical methods. It is also subject to traditional ways of understanding and perceiving art, which are historically linked to visual productions. Existing between materiality and immateriality, sound art experiments with a variety of media to create, expand, and reimagine the narratives and concepts that surround sound. However, this intermedia nature can be both a curse and a blessing; while it broadens the creation possibilities, which allows for creative freedom and experimentation, it also complicates the task of defining it within the traditional art discourse.

Through this medium's experimentation with sound art practices and its constant reliance on various resources, sound art often assumes a hybrid form that creates multiple connections between the visual and the aural, thereby avoiding hierarchies that diminish experience and understanding. This approach promotes the creation of connections between domains that are traditionally viewed as separate. The combination of visual and auditory elements aims to engage the audience in a tangible space where the work exists and is performed instead of

existing in a virtual environment (Pardo, 2017). This mix of sensorial approaches explores the connection between the visual and the aural, encouraging us to rethink the specialization of our senses and how we engage with them, inspiring a shift in the concepts used to understand sound art.

Over the last century, sound has carved its niche in the history of music. This transformation has shifted the focus from a tone-based culture to a sound culture, redirecting the attention to sounds, separating them from their tonal status, and significantly contributing to the creation of sound art (Pardo, 2017). Following the transition toward a sound culture, various elements acquired new significance and relevance in relation to sound.

Along with the changes occurring in the sound environment and growing sound culture, a change in interactions also took place. In this context, sound artists tend to be listeners themselves, understanding and working with the sounds around them. This essential shift in understanding how sound artists interact with and work with sound leads to an important shift in the role of the public or participant.

Sound art heightens a listener's sense of place, even if it fills it, whereas music aims to transcend its setting. Sound art is conceived of as a listener-to-listener relationship between the artist and the audience, unlike music performance, where the relationship is player-to-listener (Licht, 2019). As Kate Lace writes, "Sound artists have long been driven by a mission not only to get people to listen to different things but to listen differently, indeed to make listeners self-reflexively aware of themselves as listeners." (Licht, 2019).

This shift in how we engage with sound opens the door to analyzing sound, specifically sound art, in a different light. Macon Holt describes sound art as "sonic fiction" that provides ways of imagining possible worlds and makes an important distinction between the purpose or effect of both music and sound art. While music takes the sonic experience toward abstraction and meaning, sound art pushes it toward deterritorialization and open perception (Rudi, 2020).

As a practice, sound art rejects some of the preexisting categories that encompass both sound art and music, as its focus lies on the aesthetic rather than the contextual framing and process of creation (Rudi, 2020).

More recent descriptions of sound art have moved the attention towards function, still requiring intent and listening, but with a clear connection to significance in a social context, perhaps also ecological in the sense of the world (Rudi, 2020). Defining it also as any form that critically explores the cultural, political, scientific, and/or conceptual dimensions of listening.; shifting the attention from what sound and participatory practices are to what they do.

Brandon LaBelle articulates this idea by suggesting that “sound is produced and inflicted, not only by the materiality of space but also in the presence of others... thus the acoustical event is also a social one” (Rudi, 2020). Sound art, then, becomes not just an aural experience, but a cultural and social practice that challenges listeners to engage in a deeper way with the world around them.

1.2. Sound Art / Music / Time-based media

As the diversity of artistic mediums expands further, so does the number of overlaps between different disciplines; in particular, those practices that involve sound. Boundaries are increasingly blurred between music, time-based media, and sound art, challenging traditional definitions and inviting interdisciplinary exploration.

Music is commonly understood as a sequence of organized sounds and silences unfolding over time, typically adhering to structural and formal conventions (Cope, 2000). It relies on compositional elements such as melody, rhythm, harmony, timbre, and form, and primarily centers on the auditory experience, and is often shaped by stylistic traditions and cultural contexts. However, music should not be reduced to a purely acoustic or physical phenomenon, since it is also a cultural creation embedded in aesthetic, symbolic, and performative frameworks (Nattiez, 1990).

Despite its evolution across centuries, music differs from other sound-related practices that share its medium. Brandon LaBelle observes that sound art inherits much from music and yet insists on its own territory, a space between disciplines where sound is sculpture, installation, performance, and politics (LaBelle, 2006). It occupies a conceptual and interdisciplinary space that resists categorical boundaries and often merges the visual, sonic, and spatial into a unified artistic language.

Sound art operates through interdisciplinarity, resisting constraints and aiming to blur the lines between the visual, sonic, and conceptual realms (Cox & Warner, 2004). It can be said that sound art is less about what the sound is and more about how and where it is perceived. It requires viewers to develop an expanded understanding of sound, considering it as a sculptural, spatial, and conceptual medium rather than just a form of musical expression (Licht, 2007).

Sound art is motivated by a conceptual grounding, and it is often accompanied by a visual component (Kim-Cohen, 2009), which brings it closer to time-based media installations that incorporate aural elements. While time-based media artworks are also conceptually

motivated and often blur the lines between hearing and seeing through the incorporation of sound as an integral element to their rhythm, texture, and affective register (Marks, 2000). The sonic exploration that characterizes sound art differs from that of time-based media works, including sound.

Time-based media refers to artistic installations or works that unravel over time, using different mediums and artistic and technological resources. While this type of work can incorporate sound, it often focuses on narrative, visual identity, and technology, with sound serving as a vehicle but not as the central focus of the artistic research. On the other hand, sound art explores sound as a medium in itself, often blurring boundaries with installation art, sculpture, or conceptual art, prioritizing spatial, contextual, or conceptual concerns, aiming to create a listener-to-listener relationship between the audience and the artist, enhancing the listener's sense of place and presence; it involves sound exploration that happens in the same realm and in a reciprocal manner.

In contrast, other disciplines, such as music, through a relationship of performer-to-listener, seek to transcend the special boundaries and engage in one-sided communication (Licht, 2019).

In essence, sound art challenges traditional hierarchies of medium and reception. It asks audiences to rethink how sound operates, not only as an artistic tool, but as a mode of conceptual and spatial inquiry.

1.3. The Intangibility, Ephemerality, and Performativity of Sound

When studying sound, several challenges are encountered and questions arise regarding its materiality and its ways of engaging with the public.

Sound has often been defined as ephemeral and intangible, but can it be considered material? Thinking of “material” as something that is physically tangible and palpable, and strictly regarding materials as a category of matter, it can be clearly said that sound is not material. Sound can be considered as the vibration of molecules, but it does not constitute the molecules. In other words, sound becomes the synergy that promotes materials to vibrate. Nonetheless, despite not being material in the strict sense of the word, sound affects materials; it can cause things to happen, creating a sense of materiality. Regardless of being seemingly intangible, this ability to affect objects and subjects with a temporal phenomenon, such as sound and vibration, constitutes the materiality of sound (Meelberg, 2023).

So, to what extent is sound immaterial? The paradoxical nature of sound’s materiality presents challenges for those working with sound. In music composition, the creative process leading to musical works does not directly engage with sound but its written interpretation as musical notation (Meelberg, 2023).

In the last decades, new technologies have brought new potential ways for artists to engage with sound more directly. However, different authors have received these technological advancements in contrasting ways, debating whether they have provided or eliminated materiality from sound work.

Computers, displays, and speakers have replaced some materials used for producing sound, bringing sound-generating tools into the digital realm. Because of this, the apparent lack of interaction, in a haptic sense, leads some authors to view this change as a step towards immateriality (Blokumflø, 2018).

Nevertheless, while other authors agree that digital technologies have radically changed the material nature of sound, they consider sound to have transformed into a tangible object that can be manipulated and more clearly understood (Meelberg, 2023).

Digital technologies have expanded the affordances of sound, allowing for new dialogues and interactions between sound and artists. These bring a new sense of closeness during the creative process, creating a new set of exchanges between sound, listeners, space, and objects.

New interactions with sound manipulation and transformation technologies present challenges and a shift in the understanding of sound and its materiality. Sounds derived from the same source but modified and transformed into different products will have different affective qualities¹, not because their significance changes, but because of what each produces and how it operates differently.

This affective quality of sound reflects a sense of materiality that extends beyond just a machine or tool, delving into its effects on the participant. These affective qualities are responsible for sound's performative potential, which is its capacity to produce a change in the user engaging with that sound. (Meelberg, 2023)

Despite the numerous ongoing discussions about sound's materiality, it remains vulnerable in terms of its study and conservation. This vulnerability reflects on an approach still profoundly rooted in a visual culture, where meaning is created through what can be seen and observed rather than through what can be heard (Tan, 2012).

This deep-rootedness of art institutions and art analysis in visual culture challenges the understanding and approach to sound from both creative and research perspectives. As part of the previously mentioned hybridity of sound, sound has had a close relationship with the concept of performativity, a resource utilized during its installation and reflecting its historical link to music.

So, how can we talk about performativity in sound? According to Tan, sound/ music, like all elements on stage, is performative since its ontological nature is rooted in performance; sound exists in its performance (Tan, 2012).

¹ “Understood as the inducement of autonomous bodily reactions when confronted with another entity” (Meelberg, 2023).

However, while agreeing with the idea of sound being inherently performative in the sense of occurrence and listening, for this paper, performativity in sound is explored from a different perspective, not necessarily tied to the traditional concept of performance or its inherent connection to music performativity, but rather to the embodied communication that takes place when a participant interacts with the installation, with sound, and either directly or indirectly with the artists. The performativity in sound art reflects this dialogue, this conversation that occurs while confronting and experiencing the aural.

Sound art often involves motion that invites the audience to roam through the space, following the lead of sound. This characteristic is a significant difference from the ways in which music operates in relation to the public, where the listening experience happens from a fixed position (Licht, 2019).

Sound art alters the relationship between the creator, the sound artwork, and the "visitor," more accurately referred to as the "participant," shifting the interaction from passive to active.

1.4. Sound experiencing: an active relationship with the work

In a medium like sound, where the idea of materiality relies on elements quite different from those found in more tangible mediums like painting or sculpture, the existing theoretical frameworks for analyzing them often become outdated or inadequate for their proper understanding.

Art history and conservation have heavily relied on concepts like *authenticity* to determine the importance of artworks or traces of cultural heritage. However, these concepts become less useful when dealing with various media and art forms that surpass the limits of such strict terms.

Walter Benjamin analyzes authenticity, directly linking it to the unique presence of an artwork in a specific time and context. He refers to this uniqueness as an “*aura*,” a sense of originality and authenticity that the artwork possesses, which is experienced when in contact with its physical and original form. According to Benjamin, this aura gives the artwork an exceptional and almost mystical quality that makes it unique, memorable, and recognizable as original (Benjamin, 1969).

However, sound art does not fit within the small confines of authenticity and aura. These artworks require a shift in the way we analyze and approach them, shifting the emphasis from their uniqueness to the experience they create for the participants.

To understand this synergy and the process of experience creation that occurs as participants interact with sound installations, the concepts of time and space become deeply intertwined and take on meaningful significance. As Matthias Osterworld notes, sound art often functions as an intervention within a specific site, reflecting both the environment and the social context in which it is situated. Listening to sound then becomes both a physical act and a political gesture, an introspective experience that fosters alternative ways of learning, understanding, and relating to the world (Pardo, 2017). Many sound works are created in close dialogue with their environments, engaging with the acoustics and materiality of the spaces in which they are conceived or exhibited (Blokumflø, 2018).

This close connection to a particular environment often makes sound works highly space-bound, complicating their presentation or existence outside of tightly controlled settings. Despite many artists rejecting this spatial rationalization, the relationship between sound and the space in which it is produced or exhibited will inevitably shape how it is perceived, not only in relation to the space itself but also in relation to the way sound is perceived.

Sound Art practices have blurred the defined lines dividing the arts, time, space, subject, and object. The simultaneous and ephemeral nature of sound reveals that subjectivity is not singular, but rather multiple and polyphonic (Pardo, 2017).

This shift toward experience and listening invites a rethinking of subjectivity itself and thinking of ways in which it can be expanded. Sound art suggests a more fluid conception of subjectivity, one that aligns with its experimental, process-driven approach to listening (Pardo, 2017). However, when discussing the experiences derived from interacting with sound art, it is necessary to acknowledge that the ways of listening can vary not only from person to person but also within the same individual, depending on multiple factors such as context, attention, and bodily disposition.

The aesthetics of sound art, then, points toward a future in which its definition is not based on clear and distinct principles connected to distinct categories of art; instead, it will accept complexity (Pardo, 2017).

In this context, the notion of “situated listening” accentuates the level of specificity of the experience, which is dependent on the listener’s circumstances, location, bodily orientation, and attentional behavior as they engage with the sonic environment. The audience’s active role in constructing the listening experience has led scholars to describe such engagement within media and sound works in musical terms, such as “performing,” “composing,” or “sound making” (Robson, Bryan-Kinns, & McPherson, 2022).

As an artistic material, sound is uniquely immersive, collapsing the distance between the art object and its audience. Situated sonic practices work explicitly with sound in-between spaces, encouraging a shift of attention away from external sound sources towards our listening experience (Robson, Bryan-Kinns, & McPherson, 2022).”

These situated sonic practices can remind listeners of their agency and interconnectedness in the world. The artwork's identity manifests in the listener's experience, and while the artist cannot fully control how this experience is manifested, the different variables in their work make such an experience possible (Robson, Bryan-Kinns, & McPherson, 2022). Audiences are also encouraged to become aware of their spatial and bodily presence when interacting with the work. For instance, heightened awareness of bodily sounds, such as the sound of one's footsteps, might modify this spatial presence or immersion.

Ultimately, it is important to emphasize that the visitor's very presence in the work constitutes the interaction: "the moment you are in it, you are already interacting, by physically being present" (Robson, Bryan-Kinns, & McPherson, 2022).

Sound art challenges traditional ideas of authenticity and materiality by switching the focus to experience, embodiment, and spatial awareness. It encourages to rethink the ways in which art is defined and perceived, shifting the attention from fixed objects to active, and situated interactions. As listeners transform their relationship with the work from passive viewers into engaged participants, the lines between artist, audience, and environment start to blur, developing a more fluid and participatory aesthetic experience. Embracing this complexity not only broadens our understanding of sound as a medium but also creates new pathways for exploring art, subjectivity, and how we connect to the world through listening.

Building upon this perspective, it becomes clear that the theoretical foundations for understanding sound art must equally shift toward frameworks that embrace its fluid, processual, and participatory nature. During this chapter, the ideas and thoughts provided by key authors such as Adam Licht and Brandon Labelle prove fundamental to the understanding of sound art not as a material but as a presence, an event that exists in an interdisciplinary liminal space between mediums, disciplines, and resources.

The distinctions made by these authors are not only about what sound art is or how it is assumed as an artistic practice, but also about the expanded understanding of it as an embodied experience that has the power of modifying the relation between the listener or participant and the work.

These concepts, along with the phenomenological approach by Ihde, which highlights the act of listening as a situated and embodied experience that surpasses the act of creation, but is enhanced through the act of experiencing as a subjective and culturally rooted act that modifies the meaning assigning and reception as part of the viewer's own perception, will guide the transition to the proposed conservation approach that this research seeks to follow.

A conservation approach guided by these ideas seeks to detach its central structure and objectives from the traditional sense of the artwork as a static entity, followed then by a preservation approach that follows the same logic. Instead, understanding the artwork as an evolving presence that responds to multiple factors, requiring then for a flexible approach to its study and conservation.

CHAPTER II: *Challenges of dealing with immateriality*

Conservation has developed over centuries, focusing on preserving the material evidence of cultural heritage and artistic expressions. This focus is challenged by the recent decade's productions, where materiality is not solely centered on tangible aspects, becoming performativity, interactivity, and experience-based operations a more common element in artistic expressions.

This chapter discusses the basic principles of conservation practices, followed by an examination of the challenges that sound, as a medium, poses to a discipline like conservation, which heavily emphasizes tangible aspects.

Afterward, concepts such as authenticity, ephemerality, and identity are discussed to understand the ontological framework used by conservation and how it affects the analysis of different types of works with varying behaviors.

Finally, concerns are raised about experience-based works, questioning the relevance and importance of incorporating the viewer's experience as part of the conservation approach.

2.1. Challenges to Sound Conservation

Art conservation is a long-standing discipline that has existed throughout history, derived from the need to preserve pieces of human existence and protect traces of history and cultural heritage. Over time, various strategies have been developed and implemented to slow down or prevent the deterioration of historically significant objects.

Traditionally, conservation has been viewed as the process of preserving the original and “true nature” of an object by maintaining its physical, aesthetic, and historical integrity. As a practice, conservation has always centered on protecting tangible evidence of history; thus, fine art conservation has found it challenging to separate itself from the materially focused, self-contained aesthetic object of conservation (Laurenson, 2012).

In this context, concepts like the original material and condition are foundational and the axis of many conservation strategies. Considering the condition in which an object leaves the artist's studio or is introduced to a collection as its "original" state, providing a baseline against which future changes and deterioration are measured and assessed.

This narrow perception of the concept of change and conservation contributes to a restricted definition of the discipline, where conservation is mainly understood as the strategies used to preserve the original object and its physical attributes. As well as emphasizing the actions taken to retard decay on an object and prevent damage by manipulating and controlling environmental conditions and structural stability, all with the goal of maintaining the object in an unaltered state (Laurenson, 2012).

As artistic practices have evolved, so has the field of conservation. The discipline has undergone several transformations and adaptations to study and preserve diverse art forms and materials that require independent approaches and strategies, including works with complex or unconventional characteristics that challenge traditional conservation methods. In particular, the collection, preservation, and presentation of artworks with an expanded materiality that goes beyond the bounds of the solely tangible aspects represent unique difficulties. Sound-based artworks, for instance, raise significant challenges when it comes to their conservation and reinstallation.

Newer conservation practices, focusing on contemporary art and media art, have introduced innovative approaches through revised and adapted methods of preservation. Conservation has evolved into a social process involving multiple stakeholders, whose goal is no longer to act as an impartial truth enforcer of a singular interpretation of authenticity, but to participate in the mediation and preservation of the core values embedded in an artwork.

In this expanded view, conservation's focus has shifted from the material to understanding the relationships between the artwork's material condition and its meaning. These actions are taken to secure the preservation of immaterial aspects in the work, bolstering the conservation of significant intangible properties.

This evolution is especially evident in the conservation of time-based media art, where conservators no longer assume that a material state needs to be preserved; this notion has been replaced by the idea of the work's identity, which dictates the elements that must be preserved to avoid loss of value. That identity may include specific materials, spatial characteristics, as well as a variety of multisensorial experiences, including sound (Brost, 2021).

Much of the literature on sound in installations falls within the scope of time-based media. While many terms and methods developed to study and conserve time-based media can also inform and be applied to sound art conservation, due to a specific set of shared characteristics that aid in understanding and approaching sound works, they are fundamentally different and require a distinct approach for their study and analysis.

In recent years, increased interest in sound art has sparked concern over the fragility of sonic heritage, leading to the development of specific conservation strategies focused on the archival and preservation of sound. However, many of these initiatives remain focused on the tangible, primarily the degradation of recording supports and the obsolescence of analog equipment. These texts also highlight the importance of digitalization tasks performed at sound archives, where the migration to current technologies appears to be the path to ensuring the survival of sound heritage (Rodríguez Reséndiz, 2016).

While these approaches are essential for preserving historical recordings, the identity of many artworks using sound as a medium extends far beyond what can be captured or archived, since their identity often includes elements that resist fixed representation. Therefore, sound art conservation must adopt broader methods, utilizing various approaches to studying and addressing an artwork's needs and unique challenges effectively.

In the effort to find an appropriate way of conserving sound, conservation has resorted to borrowing strategies designed for other materials or art forms, such as music. Although it has been established that, despite their similarities, sound art and music differ significantly in terms of materiality, some approaches and preservation strategies for ephemeral or immaterial elements in music can be borrowed and adapted for sound art, such as using score-like documentation with a set of instructions and hints for a musical performance, can be adapted to guide the reinstallation of sound art events while maintaining a core identity.

This shift in the approaches and techniques used for the analysis and preservation of sound art represents a paradigm of "letting go," an acknowledgment that conservation may involve accepting change (Grill, Bovermann, & Schilling, 2022), and recognizing that different conditions, times, locations, and even participants will produce varying versions of a work. However, while embracing this variability and fluidity, safeguarding the work's identity becomes the priority of this variant of conservation.

Due to the inherent fluidity and changing nature of sound installations, comprehensive documentation becomes the primary conservation tool. Since this type of installation-based work relies on reinstallation, the documentation must be equally fluid, expansive, and responsive to evolving contexts to accommodate the changing needs of each particular case.

In some cases, essential components of sound works cannot be stored in museum vaults, as they are produced and recreated each time the work is presented. This dynamic adds a layer of complexity to analyzing and documenting the work, where information must be gathered from sources beyond the artist, considering that many other collaborators or stakeholders can be vital sources of valuable information. Collecting and organizing this information as an

ongoing process can help preserve artworks whose nature is subject to constant flux (Brost, 2021).

With each reinstallation, a degree of “interpretive authority” will occur within the parameters previously defined by the artist. Robust documentation will provide a better understanding of the work’s identity and the changes it has endured over time. (Botaniq, 2011) This documentation can be specified either “thickly” or “thinly”: the former limits variation by detailing essential characteristics, while the latter allows for greater interpretive flexibility.

To tackle this problem, the Phillips model distinguishes between the types of reports necessary to conserve each aspect of sound in time-based media installations. Starting with the *Identity Report*, which serves as an evolving score, this report acts as the dossier for the entire work. The *Identity Report* includes, as a starting point, the artist’s instructions received at acquisition (when possible), as well as the complete exhibition and production history, a description of all elements that compose it, considerations to be taken when placing the work in different environments, the work’s presentation history, technical specifications, conservation concerns, and important contacts. This document will serve as a living and evolving document that changes along with the artwork (Brost, 2021).

On the other hand, the *Iteration Report* documents the manifestations of the work and aims to be a comprehensive report of a single manifestation of the artwork. This report lists all the stakeholders who impacted the installation's appearance. It includes a record of the exhibition space's physical parameters and every significant installation element. The *Iteration Report* also includes an iteration evaluation; new Iteration Reports are added as the work continues to be reinstalled (Brost, 2021).

While Amy Brost’s take on these frameworks accounts for sound elements in time-based media, works where sound is the core conceptual and creative focus require even more detailed and specific documentation.

To explore a work’s sonic identity, Brost proposes conducting interviews and questionnaires with the artist, as well as researching past iterations of the work. The documentation should

cover all sound-producing and sound-influencing components of the installation, as well as their spatial behavior and significance. It should also describe the desired sound dynamics within the space and the ideal listener experience, including tuning, listening modes, and spatial perception (Brost, 2021).

Sound art conservation requires ongoing interdisciplinary dialogue and the inclusion of diverse stakeholders during the decision-making process, who can contribute to producing meaningful documentation regarding the aural properties of a work. The analysis and assessment process should be continuous, reactive, and grounded in a deep understanding of the specific context and history of each artwork, while addressing specific ethical concerns regarding its conservation. This documentation functions not just as a record, but as a tool for sustaining the identity of artworks that are as dynamic and ephemeral as sound itself.

A good example of a work that shows characteristics indicating that its reinstallation can be approached in different ways to achieve the same outcome, but changing specific variables would alter the artist's intent and the work's identity, is *Oscillating Steel Grids Along the Brooklyn Bridge* (1983) by **Bill Fontana**.

The project involves eight to sixteen sensitive, waterproof microphones mounted beneath the steel grid of the Brooklyn Bridge to capture sounds made by cars crossing it (Amerika Hauses Berlin, 1983). The cars on the bridge would create an oscillating tone, with frequency variations depending on their speed. For the Brooklyn Bridge's centennial in 1983, Fontana aimed to relocate this humming sound elsewhere in New York, where it could evoke a sense of something being out of place (Fontana, 1987).

To simultaneously capture the tones produced by the cars, each microphone was connected to a broadcast-quality telephone line in New York. The signals from the microphones were broadcast simultaneously to a series of loudspeakers at the sculpture site (Amerika Hauses Berlin, 1983). The speakers were hidden in the open plaza below the World Trade Center towers, ensuring that changes in factors such as traffic or weather could be heard simultaneously at the bridge and the plaza, creating an acoustic delay (Fontana, 1987).

As the artist describes it, the humming of the Brooklyn Bridge (familiar to the inhabitants of the area) became an acoustic paradox when placed in the selected architectural context. The kinesthetic sense of the humming emerging from the plaza was an important formal element of the sound sculpture (Fontana, 1987).

In this case, while it could be suggested that the recordings obtained from previous installations of this work, and the sounds would in fact come from the same environment and a previous iteration, it would not create the exact aural correspondence as when the sounds are reproduced from a livestream.

The work was created in a context that has undergone several changes over time, affecting the acoustic identity of the place, which could potentially alter the interaction and the experience produced by the work.

Sound art conservation requires an ongoing redefinition of traditional methodologies, embracing a flexible, interdisciplinary, and context-aware approach. As sound works often exist beyond the boundaries of physical permanence, their preservation depends not solely on maintaining original materials but on keeping their conceptual, spatial, and experiential identities. By altering the static focus of preservation to a dynamic documentation and interpretation, conservation becomes an act of translation rather than replication, as well as an evolving process shaped by collaboration, intention, and responsiveness to specific conditions. Focusing on the preservation of sound art not as a task of freezing an artwork in time, but about ensuring its resonance continues across shifting environments, technologies, and audiences.

This ongoing evolution in conservation practices for time-based, performative, or inherently ephemeral works requires a deeper examination of the core concepts that have traditionally guided the discipline. As conservation starts to shift its focus from preserving static and unchanged material aspects to keeping the dynamic and complex identities of artworks, key terms such as *authenticity* and *change* need to be reevaluated and reimagined. The fluid and experiential nature of works such as sound installations challenges long-held assumptions that associate authenticity with material fixity, which means that to effectively conserve these

works, it becomes necessary to redefine the framework through which authenticity is understood and measured, prompting a critical exploration of how authenticity and ephemerality intersect within the conservation discourse.

2.2. Authenticity and ephemerality in conservation

For many years, traditional conservation has understood the authenticity of artworks in terms of their material characteristics, making the physical object the main focus of all the preservation efforts. Within this framework, the conservation object becomes a unique, tangible trace of the past; an object containing material evidence that can be authenticated (Laurenson, 2012).

This object-centered conservation approach aligns with the traditional notion of authenticity, which emphasizes the idea of originality and completeness. However, such a view over the concept of authenticity, deeply rooted in material and tangible elements, leaves out a range of artistic expressions that do not fit those boundaries.

In classical Western conservation theories of the 19th and 20th centuries, physical integrity and authenticity were believed to reside solely in a physical object's persistence and its aesthetic potential. Following this paradigm within conservation, all actions taken to preserve an artwork are focused on mitigating change (perceived as loss) through minimal and reversible interventions aimed at preserving the tangible object.

As a result, this notion of authenticity found in traditional conservation frameworks is well-suited to what has been defined as the autographic arts (those based on physical media or material-based). However, it proves inadequate to describe the allographic arts (performative or variable works), representing significant challenges regarding the analysis and preservation of some works, demanding a shift in practices to achieve a thorough understanding and integral conservation. For such a shift to take place within conservation practice, an ontological transformation in the framework of conservation is required; since as long as the framework's focus is on the material aspect, so will the notions of authenticity and loss (Laurenson, 2012).

Over time, the concept of authenticity has undergone several revisions and changes in its definition. Confronted by the ambiguous materiality and ephemeral, intangible components of contemporary artworks, it has evolved in various ways to accommodate new forms of artistic production and expression. Once centered solely on materiality, authenticity is now

often understood as a compliance with the artist's explicit directives and intentions. However, artworks that unfold through different modes of interaction and exhibition continue to challenge this definition, demonstrating the need to further rethink what "authentic" truly means.

In many artworks produced in recent decades, the continuity of their presence is not solely dependent on the physical persistence of the original materials, nor is their authenticity guaranteed only by maintaining a tangible object. Conceptual and process-based practices, especially those that challenge Western art-making paradigms, cannot be preserved merely through the conservation of unchanging materials (Castriota, 2023).

A clear example is the case of sound art, which often exists in a state of ambiguous materiality, where one of its central ideas is that it should be experienced to be fully realized. Like performative arts, sound art may contain different degrees of tangible components, but it only comes into being when installed and experienced. Considering this, the parameters of change and authenticity must follow a different logic that allows a higher degree of fluidity, striving for the work to remain authentic even when exhibited in different places and under different conditions.

In this context, the traditional sense of authenticity is replaced by the work-defining properties of a piece, where the conservation object is focused on the work's identity. Conservation efforts shift from preserving material fixity to safeguarding these properties that conform and define the work. However, a more fluid and open understanding of the work's identity brings new risks and challenges. In many installation-based works, several aspects of the installation are undetermined and left for the teams involved in the reinstallation to discuss, negotiate, and redefine anew. Thus, it becomes essential to distinguish between elements that are fixed and those that are flexible. Each reinstallation of a time-based media work may require revisiting and occasionally revising previous decisions by making the necessary modifications to uphold the work's identity.

Given these considerations, the conservation practice needs to rethink its goals and methodologies. When dealing with time-based media or works with more ephemeral and interactive characteristics; conservation becomes focused on the strategies used to understand, maintain, and document the defining properties and identity of an artwork, aiming to preserve the work's ability to be reinstalled, allowing for the possibility of realizing different iterations of the work while remaining authentic, understanding identity not as the original condition but as a dynamic process.

In recent decades, the framework that the conservation practice follows has increasingly come to see artworks as abstract entities that exist across time and space, supported by concrete objects or events. This shift in perspective redirects the focus away from material fixity and permanence toward the artwork's identity, essence, or experience that the work creates.

A redefinition of the conservation framework that shifts the concept of authenticity and identity also transforms the understanding of the concepts of change and loss, as well as the reference state against which these concepts will be measured, used to determine what must be preserved to avoid deterioration. Here, the identity of the work is defined by a collection of work-defining properties, including the artist's instructions and approved installation, which will serve as a model or guide for future iterations of the work. An iteration of the work deemed inauthentic, in this context, would be one where the identity of the work has been compromised (Laurenson, 2012).

Alongside these shifts in conservation practices, the role of museums has also undergone significant evolution. Museums now found themselves, reconciling the fidelity to the artist's original intention with the inevitable change produced by the passage of time (Serexhe, 2013), as a result, documentation has become an essential task where detailed information related to the work is collected through interviews and questionnaires, to compile a "score" like document that will provide valuable information about the work's identity. This score can be enriched by including information collected from various stakeholders or participants throughout the project's iterations, as well as insights from curators, conservators, technicians, and audiences who engage with the work during its iterations. In this framework,

artworks that are thickly and clearly specified are less likely to lose defining properties during reinstallation.

The evolving understanding of the concept of authenticity, focusing on experience, identity, and participation, that grows over the fixation on material permanence, marks a turning point in the conservation practice. As artworks increasingly incorporate ephemeral, interactive, and performative elements, traditional material-based approaches become insufficient. To respond accordingly, conservation has broadened and must continue to expand its scope to include not only the artist's intention but also the dynamic interaction between the work and its audience. By doing so, conservation moves toward a more inclusive and adaptive framework, reflecting on the shifting nature of contemporary media and sound art, and prepares the ground for a deeper analysis of the viewer's role in shaping and sustaining the work's identity. This change opens the possibility of reconsidering how art is experienced, documented, and preserved, going beyond object-centered practices into the realm of participation and the possibilities this framework offers.

2.3. Conservation concerns regarding experience-based works

Traditional art history is no longer fully equipped to capture and describe non-traditional or non-material-based works reliably. New conditions for the production and exhibition of art have led to different approaches that challenge longstanding assumptions related to care and preservation, drifting away from the notions of unique originality and fixed authenticity.

To understand the divergent needs of recent creations in relation to more traditional ones, it is essential to consider the evolving relationship between art expressions and the viewer/participant. A fundamental change in this relationship lies in the possibility of experiencing the work in a way that prompts the viewer to transition from a passive observation to an active participation. The participant can influence their interaction with the artwork within a set of parameters established by the artist.

These interactions often stand outside the passage of time, existing in a state beyond time, and ceasing to be events belonging to an irreversible past but rather as potential events amid other possibilities, sometimes even improbabilities, including a series of “eventualities” that may or may not happen (Serexhe, 2013).

Interactive works are inherently reactive and possess a degree of openness that allows viewers to alter many factors during the interaction. This openness makes their documentation and conservation challenging since they must capture the complexity of their physical elements, the intangible and ephemeral aspects, the artist’s intention, and the effects it produces on the viewer, seeking through all these efforts to identify the work’s identity under ever-changing conditions.

While in traditional art practice, the artist’s intention is undoubtedly important, it is always limited to the work itself, which is stable and self-contained. However, in the case of interactive works, “intention” is more complex because it manifests the work as an instrument that can be “played” by the viewer, allowing a wide range of possibilities. Considering this, the notion of “intention” becomes more conceptual and is compelled to acknowledge the viewer-actor who brings their subjectivity, multiplying the artistic apparatus’s potential effects (Serexhe, 2013).

Due to a more complex dynamic, new questions emerge during the conservation and documentation process. While the artist's intention remains a vital element for understanding the identity of the work, factors such as the reception and experience of the user become fundamental during the research and analysis process. In some cases, the user becomes part of the entire artistic apparatus: the viewer is included, movements are captured, along with gestures and comings and goings, and these are translated into various kinds of feedback. This experience forms the core of the artist's intention, but, to some extent, evades it, as the uniqueness of each viewer or user shapes it (Serexhe, 2013).

The increase in artworks with ambiguous materiality or interactive qualities (such as sound art or time-based media) has evidenced the gap between conservation practices and the needs of these artworks. Where conservation strategies focused on the work's materiality, or even those usually used to capture ephemeral or intangible elements, become insufficient when faced with experience-based operations.

While the role played by the audience in the design, experience, and interpretation of a work is generally overlooked, it is a crucial element when analyzing interactive works. Therefore, collecting data from those experiencing the work can provide helpful information about possible discrepancies between the artist's intention and the actual reception of the work. This information can prove valuable in identifying which aspects of the artwork trigger feelings or actions in the viewer and provide tools to measure change over time; data that can be vital during the decision-making process for the conservation and reinstallation of the work.

To achieve this goal, the documentation must be comprehensive and inclusive, focusing on various stakeholders and participants who may contribute to the information gathering process concerning different components of the work and its history. Considering that while the information provided by the artist is essential, the input from other individuals involved in the process, such as producers, performers, curators, designers, and audiences, is also important.

A shift in documentation methodology may also be necessary when approaching an artwork, shifting the focus from its ontology² to consider its epistemic potential³, thereby understanding the work as evolving over time rather than frozen at a specific moment. The documentation practice should be understood not as a closed event but as an open one, requiring periodic review and updating whenever new information is gathered (Giannachi, 2023).

Faced with these inherent changes in the conception of artworks, where the audience now plays a significant role, conservation and archiving practices inside museums, galleries, and by collectors must adapt to meet the evolving needs of art creation.

To bridge this gap, new strategies must be implemented and integrated as part of the regular practice; these strategies involve collecting, interpreting, and analyzing spectators' experiences to inform decision-making and become part of the work's documentation (Giannachi, 2023).

In light of these evolving artistic practices, conservation must undergo a transformation towards sustaining dynamic experiences, embracing openness, collaboration, and adaptability, to ensure that experience-based works continue to resonate meaningfully with future audiences.

² What the work is

³ The knowledge it produces

CHAPTER III: *Tangibly conserving the intangible*

In this third chapter, the context for contemporary art conservation is established, exploring various existing models and approaches for studying and preserving contemporary and media art. Starting with the *Decision-Making Model for Contemporary Art Conservation and Presentation* by the Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences (2021), which offers a clear and guided method for approaching artworks with defining properties that go beyond their materiality, as well as the *Documentation Framework for Sound in Time-based Media Installation Art* by Amy Brost; created to identify and conserve aural aspects within art installations.

This section will be followed by identifying potential growth areas for both models when analyzing sound art as the primary focus of the conservation process.

Later, the text delves into *Botanik*, an artistic project by Gabriel Vanegas that explores the challenges of contemporary art conservation by proposing a workshop to reflect on how art is experienced and consumed, while gathering and documenting recollections from those who experience and directly engage with the artworks.

Finally, the ways in which one can benefit from the other will be explained: merging the structured method created by the conservation discipline with the experience documenting strategies used in *Botanik*, to aid the understanding of intangible and ephemeral elements that are part of the artwork, and how these elements are being preserved and transmitted in the context of possible reinstallation.

3.1. *Conservation methods for contemporary art*

From its origins, contemporary and media artworks have challenged traditional museological practices and approaches to various aspects surrounding their conservation, including documentation and restoration, due to their ephemeral, technical, and multi-part nature (Serexhe, 2013). This forces disciplines to revisit and adapt their methodologies for approaching and understanding artworks.

The role of the conservator has been based primarily on a professional ethic code that states that all conservation efforts must be carried out in strict fidelity to maintaining the work's originality and historicity (Scholte & Wharton, 2011). However, this attachment to the idea of an isolated past that harbours tangible evidence and possesses the authenticity of an artwork within might not be compatible with experience-based and ephemeral artworks such as sound art, since they exist in a constant dynamic of re-enactment and reinterpretation.

In this sense, the boundaries of sound are remarkably fluid, as it can merge different disciplines, such as art, science, and technology, increasing not only their material ambiguity but also their interpretative complexity. In addition to this, sound art is often an inherently fluid art form that, despite sometimes having a high degree of space-specificity, is still subjected to constant, uncontrollable variables, such as changes within the space, changes derived from time, or even from participants interacting and experiencing the work; challenging the way it can be perceived and studied.

To maintain the initially intended effect of an artwork, the conservator must determine which details of the artwork contribute substantially to conveying the artistic intention (Laurenson, 2012), while acknowledging the complexity of their conservation and the need to develop methods that better suit a diversity of contemporary and media productions.

Different methods have successfully bridged the gap between the conservation practice and contemporary or new media productions, and some of them have tackled and acknowledged the importance of conserving sound elements in artworks.

The *Decision-Making Model for Contemporary Art Conservation and Presentation*, developed by the Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, proposes an extensive guide used for the analysis and conservation of contemporary artworks in an integral and ethical manner. The decision-making model provides a clear framework for addressing complex conservation issues in modern and contemporary art, facilitating discussions, documentation, and recording of the decision-making process, and guiding emerging professionals. The model was created in 1999 and underwent a revision in 2021 to address evolving needs in contemporary artworks, such as the importance of considering the artwork's intangible properties.

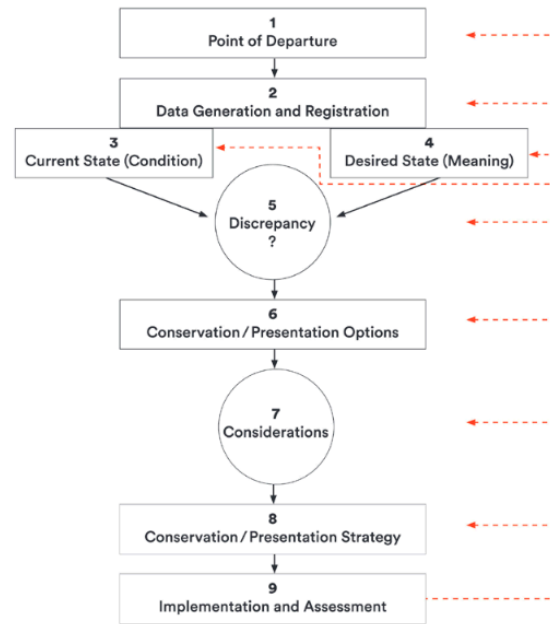


Figure 1 - The Decision-Making Model for Contemporary Art Conservation and Presentation, 2021

The model consists of 9 steps, each including a brief explanation of the objective of that specific step, a set of instructions on how to proceed, an example (if applicable), and a checklist to follow (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, 2021).

The following pages will delve into the specifics of each step presented on the decision-making model, and highlight both the potentially positive implications of applying a model of this kind in an art form such as sound art, as well as identifying the possible growth areas where the model could benefit from a different set of data gathering strategies to enrich the understanding on such a complex artistic medium.

1. Point of departure

This step explains and establishes the basic decision-making process. It is divided into three sub-steps, where users are asked to identify and describe certain information, to improve their understanding of the process and its necessity. This step emphasizes that a decision-making process begins with a specific interest or situation that requires study and analysis.

The sub-steps are divided into:

a. The circumstances

In this step, the context, institutional framework, or infrastructure in which the decision-making process occurs is studied.

The reasons why the artwork became a subject of study are stated and evaluated, as well as the establishment of initial questions (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, 2021).

b. The initial aims

During this sub-step, the cause that triggered the decision-making process is documented. This aim is the main objective adopted by stakeholders during the process, and in a sense, the one that will guide the decision-making process.

c. Stakeholders, intentions, and overarching goals

In this section, the stakeholders to be involved in the decision-making process must be identified and listed. Providing information regarding who is or should be involved during the process, their professional background, motivation, or interests in the case study, as well as the group's mode of decision-making, their overarching goal, and their ethical common ground (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, 2021).

The starting point of the *Decision-Making Model for Contemporary Art Conservation and Presentation* provides an excellent basis for initiating a collaborative, in-depth analysis of a specific issue or situation related to the conservation or installation of an artwork. When adapting this model to sound art productions, it would be useful to consider the incorporation

of sound technicians and acoustic specialists as part of the decision-making process, since they can offer valuable insights into aspects that a traditionally trained conservator might not be able to identify or think about.

2. Data Generation and Registration

The data gathering and registration involves researching and recording relevant information about the artwork to create a solid ground for a thorough study and comprehension of different instances that comprise the piece. This comprehensive understanding is achieved through collecting various data.

The required data includes the artworks description, information about the technology used, as well as the creative process that conduced to the final product, its overall condition, handling requirements, installation manual or instructions (scores or notations), past iterations, acquisition history, as well as oral or written information provided by the artists or their studios (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, 2021).

The data gathering is not a neutral process; many subjectivities from different stakeholders are at play. That is why it is important to clearly establish the research's purpose and the context in which it occurs during the earlier step. However, while setting clear boundaries is essential, this step is not confined to the specific scenario where the decision-making occurs, as gathering information is an accumulative process involving data that could be useful for future revisions (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, 2021).

During the data collection for interactive and experience-based sound works, details about how they are received and perceived by participants can help understand the importance of certain aspects that might seem unimportant when analyzed without context. For this purpose, using data-gathering strategies focused on both the artist's input and intention, as well as the work's reception, could result in a comprehensive understanding of the work.

3. Current condition

The goal of this step is to gain a thorough understanding of the artwork's current condition by analyzing the information gathered during the previous phase, *the data gathering*, and using documentary resources as a reference to consider possible changes the piece has undergone throughout its history (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, 2021).

During this step, an analysis of both the tangible and intangible aspects of the work is conducted, including potential additional examinations such as scientific testing, specific material research, raising questions about material aging, and possible technological obsolescence, to understand the current condition and potential deterioration (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, 2021).

To understand the current condition, it is also essential to know and understand the artist's instructions and statements on significant properties, both tangible and intangible, and how the current state of the artwork can be assessed within that context (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, 2021).

The analysis of a sound artwork's current state, along with questions about its intangible values, should include considerations of the space where it was initially installed and whether the work was specifically created for that exact space and its characteristics. These questions should prompt further inquiries about the feasibility of reinstallation in a different context, the implications of such a decision, and whether the artist agrees with it. Notes on the qualities that produce the particular experience and transmit the identity of the work should be registered to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the work on both its tangible and intangible aspects.

4. Desired State (Meaning)

In this step, the goal is to gain a thorough understanding of the artwork so that an informed consensus can be reached about its identity, as well as the conditions under which the work is considered authentic.

Various properties considered constitutive to the identity of the work are stated and registered, considering different aspects as the artist's intent or concept, the attributed meanings that are derived from its materials, the creation process, the intended reception of the artwork, and its biography (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, 2021).

This process must consider the information collected about the work's materiality, spatial qualities, and interactive aspects. Specifically, for sound artworks, there should be a focus on how sound transmission and the installation space affect or modify the identity of the artwork.

5. Discrepancy?

During the fifth step, those involved in the decision-making process are responsible for determining if there is a discrepancy between the artwork's current state and its desired state. This task must be performed with prior knowledge and understanding of the artist's intentions, including whether some degree of change or decay is expected (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, 2021).

This step is fundamental, since it will aid in determining whether some characteristic in its current state does not align with the work's identity. Therefore, it will guide how to proceed with the conservation or presentation strategies, based on what is defined as its "authentic state", historicity, function, and artist's intent.

6. Conservation/ Presentation Options

This step aims to establish a conservation or installation goal that will reduce the discrepancy between the current and desired states of the work, or to avoid future preventable damage or deterioration. It is also important to acknowledge that choosing not to take action is a viable alternative during this step (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, 2021).

7. Considerations

In this step, the options proposed earlier are reviewed and discussed to identify any potential implications or risks they may pose to the artwork. This process involves focusing on different criteria and highlighting various values of the work when considering the available options (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, 2021).

During the analysis and stating of the considerations, the multiple options for conserving and presenting sound art should be clearly stated, described, and analyzed, taking into consideration how different variables would impact the sound reception, interaction, and the viewer's experience. This step is especially beneficial when exploring different choices and understanding how emphasizing specific values over others can alter the work's identity. Factors such as the relevance of different characteristics of the technologies used in the works should also be considered, acknowledging that multiple elements, such as visual effects, sound quality, definition, among others, may contain a higher degree of relevance within the work.

During this step, various resources and information should be used to determine whether a work created for a specific space can and should be reinstalled in a different context, recognizing that some works are tied to their original space and may be lost if relocated.

8. Conservation/ Presentation strategy

The final conservation or presentation strategy is selected and developed, including the actions to be taken and the methods to be used. If any clarification is needed regarding materials or methods, research and testing should be conducted before proceeding with the implementation (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, 2021).

9. Implementation and Assessment

During the final step of this model, the immediate effects derived from the implementation of the selected strategy must be closely monitored to identify and address any immediate effects on the artwork, ensuring that the necessary actions can be taken promptly.

On the other hand, a thorough reflection should be conducted on whether the final strategy effectively addressed the discrepancy or problem.

The implementation process should be documented, analyzed, and evaluated, taking into account possible necessary adjustments to the strategies used previously (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, 2021).

Experience-based works might require a different set of data to understand the impact of the implementations derived from the decision-making process. Information that comes not only from the evaluation as an outside observer, but also from the input from someone who experiences and interacts with the work, is necessary to fully grasp the implications.

While this model is an excellent tool to guide the decision-making process for a variety of art forms, including those with more complex natures and intangible elements, it remains broad when faced with the specific needs, problems, and challenges posed by sound artworks.

Contemporary art conservators have explored different ways of registering and archiving sounds that form part of time-based media, as seen in the case of *A Documentation Framework for Sound in Time-based Media Installation Art* by Amy Brost, where the author

proposes an extension to the documentation framework by Joanna Phillips, *"Reporting Iterations: A Documentation Model for Time-Based Media Art"*, that recovers both the identity of the work and a history of its iterations in two separate registers, the Identity Report and the Iterations Report, understanding the Identity Report as the evolving “score” and the Iterations Report as the history of the work’s “manifestations”, therefore forming a comprehensive record of the work’s life.

The Identity Report aims to be a comprehensive record of the entire artwork; using the artist's instructions, obtained during the acquisition process, the work's production and exhibition history, including considerations on its reinstallations in different contexts, the preservation concerns about the work, its technical aspects, as well as the relevant stakeholders involved during the process. This report is expected to act as a living document that has the capability of adapting and evolving along with the artwork, while remaining open to constant change and modification (Brost, 2021).

On the contrary, the Iteration Report is meant to reflect a detailed record of a single instance of the work. It is created at a specific moment and acts as proof of the artwork’s history. This report lists everyone involved in influencing the work’s appearance, with a comprehensive account of their contributions, including all physical parameters of the exhibition space and the key elements that were part of the installation (Brost, 2021).

Amy Brost’s take on these reports includes the understanding and registration of the sonic identity of the work through interviews and adapted questionnaires with the artist at the moment of acquisition. Including the following parameters:

1. Acoustic events/sources and influencers
 - a. Sound sources
 - b. Spatial relationship
 - c. Behaviour
 - d. Significance

2. Space/medium
 - a. Directionality
 - b. Obstruction/occlusion
 - c. Reflections. Echoes
 - d. Reverberation
 - e. Outdoor
 - f. Medium
3. Listeners
 - a. Desired listener experience
 - b. Tuning
 - c. Additional listener experiences
 - d. Modes of Listening (Brost, 2021).

While much of this data can be obtained through interviews with the artist and research, and the ideal expected participant's experience can be detailed, it is challenging, or perhaps even impossible, to obtain unbiased information on the listener's actual experience from a position with a deeper level of involvement with the work. Both models and previous approaches address fundamental aspects of care and understanding that can help preserve complex works with intangible elements, including strategies to guide the information registration for sound artworks. While integrating frameworks such as Brost's takes on the Identity and Iteration Reports enhances the understanding of sonic identity and technical variability, there is no method with a clear focus on sound art that involves the participant, which could measure whether the expected experience and interaction are achieved, as well as aid in identifying which elements support or hinder said experience, opening the possibility to include an unexplored critical dimension for sound art analysis.

To achieve this, an inclusive conservation strategy is required, where the aim is not only focused on documenting and preserving both tangible and intangible instances, but also incorporates the audience's feedback and interaction as essential data. This approach involves participants not just as passive observers but as co-creators of meaning in sound artworks.

3.2. *Botaniq: Experience-based conservation*

Botaniq is an artistic project by Gabriel Vanegas that addresses the challenges of preserving contemporary art by proposing an *art conservation workshop* that reflects on how art is experienced and consumed, and how these experiences can be documented and preserved.

Conservation faces several challenges when dealing with artworks that contain variations of intangible qualities. Based on this premise, Vanegas's project draws a comparison between preserving intangible aspects of art and the way knowledge was transmitted in the 16th century, when the conquistadors in America encountered fruits or elements that would not survive the journey to another continent, but still wanted to share their knowledge and experiences. Through writing and drawings in diaries, where they recorded their own experiences, they tried to capture the essence or spirit of what they saw, touched, heard, smelled, and tasted. This process, where the only way for a group of people to experience something was through someone else's narration, shifted the role of this second-hand experience from a reinterpretation of reality, captured through words and images, into reality itself.

Vanegas then suggests that, similar to the dynamic that unfolded in the 16th century, a way to preserve art could be through experiences and interaction with the artwork. By reinterpreting and capturing its essence, it becomes possible to look beyond the material qualities of a work of art and explore the narrative of a unique and unrepeatable moment, revealing important yet often unseen details within the work's identity (Vanegas, 2011).

The workshop engaged visitors to an art exhibition, incorporating them into the conservation process by transforming the experience of an event or artwork into a personal diary from their perspective as interactors (Botaniq, 2011). The workshop compiled the experience journals created by people interacting with the artworks and utilized their input as a means of preservation. The project involved analyzing art pieces displayed at an art event, illustrating, composing graphically, and describing both the work, the interaction, and the experience (Botaniq, 2011). Each participant chose one of the works, which they would illustrate and describe, recording information on the artwork, their interactions with it, and

the experiences derived from this interaction. At the end of the workshop, the diaries produced by every participant were compiled in an encyclopedic physical and digital publication called "Codex Media_Art" (Botaniq, 2011). Allowing the community to view the results and imagine the work of art through someone else's reinterpretation.

The deep exercise of reinterpretation that every person undergoes in the workshops allowed for an equal form of continuity across oral, written, and audio-visual traditions, achieving a raw description of the experience lived by the masses rather than a professional assessment or analysis made by an expert with background information about the artwork, enabling an exploration of the subjectivity and experience associated with an artwork, examining it through the reinterpretation of someone contemporary to its context and time.

The workshops unfolded following an open call that invited the public to take part in the project, where they had to select an art piece and engage with it over four days, aiming to break the cycle of quick art consumption and encouraging viewers to spend thoughtful time with the work. The participants were asked to record their experiences and the details of their distinct interactions with the art pieces in a personal diary or journal, therefore transforming these subjective and intangible concepts into written or graphic entries that could eventually be discussed and archived as part of the work's documentation. Bringing the documentation process into a dynamic of reinterpretation that occurs without the presence or explicit directive of the author, but rather the cognitive process derived from each individual's subjectivity.

This effort creates a multilayered experience that shifts based on each person's perspective. By utilizing various resources to document the event, visitors can process what they saw and interact with the artwork in ways they might not during a typical visit.

Although *Botaniq* does not aim to conserve an artistic object, it instead focuses on the event and the interactor's experience, acting as a witness to a passing moment that we cannot fully know except through someone's narration. The data-gathering strategies used during the project could be helpful in supporting the conservation process for complex artworks.

Gathering different testimonies of these experiences can help the conservator understand how a non-professional in the art field interprets and perceives an artwork without any context or background on the art piece.

This information can be especially beneficial for achieving a successful reinstallation of works that have a degree of site-specificity. While the information recovered from the artist will be essential and constitute the core of the conservation strategy. Recovering experiences from the participant can also help identify whether the installation of the artwork conveys what is intended or if the meaning is getting lost somewhere in between the experience, shedding some light on the elements that are helping or diminishing the final interaction with the work.

The artist's materialization of their work does not always align with the way viewers interpret it after the interaction, as it is created from different subjectivities and with varying levels of understanding. Experience is not fixed or based solely on objective facts; rather, it is a construction of subjectivities that can change from moment to moment. However, the strategies and dynamics proposed in the art project have the potential to become valuable tools in the conservation and decision-making process for understanding, conveying, and preserving the intangible aspects or experiences produced by the artworks, through the retrieval of these experiences, the analysis of the obtained data, and the reinterpretation of the information to reach conclusions that can add a layer or depth to the documentation on the work.

3.3. Merging: *Proposed strategies*

Sound art manifests itself in a great variety of ways, where the values that acquire a higher relevance vary from work to work. These types of artworks typically have a high degree of specification that dictates how they are to be interacted with and to what extent, thereby altering the way they are experienced and how their particular identity is transmitted. Highlighting the deep connection between direct experience, perception, and the understanding of such works, underlining how the artwork's meaning emerges from the interaction itself, echoing the idea that experience is shaped by technological mediation, especially in sound art, where electronic devices modify our listening capabilities. The embodied nature of listening, shaped by instruments and technology, challenges traditional views, making direct experience not only a source of meaning but also a catalyst for change (Ihde, 2007).

The inherent complexity of intertwined qualities and values within each artwork makes its conservation through a rigid approach difficult, if not impossible, without risking harm to its identity. Therefore, the need arises to resort to different strategies that could aid in the collection and comprehension of data that cannot be obtained exclusively from the work's materiality.

Derived from this complexity, conservators face the challenge of preserving a work using a rigorous methodology and analysis approach, such as the '*Decision-Making Model for Contemporary Art Conservation and Presentation*', which allows for greater precision in studying and understanding the artwork as a whole, and to achieve accurate and comprehensive documentation practice as the framework proposed by Amy Brost in '*A Documentation Framework for Sound in Time-based Media Installation Art*'; while remaining open to a certain degree of fluidity in the work, which might require different information sources to understand its complexity fully, acknowledging that some aspects of the work's identity can only be fully accessed through the interpretive process that unfolds in experience.

From a phenomenological perspective, especially in what Ihde calls “first phenomenology,” this process involves a careful uncovering of the lived, subjective, and culturally embedded experience of the artwork. The change in perception through tools emphasizes that meaning is not only created but also enacted in and through perceptual acts (Ihde, 2007).

Sound artworks that possess a close relation to the space in which they were previously installed, or require elements that could alter the viewer’s experience, demand data that can only be provided by those interacting with them.

Gabriel Vanegas's artistic exploration, *Botanik*, addresses the concept of conserving art through the viewer's experience, challenging the rhythm in which art is consumed and transforming the interaction into a reflective and reinterpretative exercise. While this information in itself as a single entry or as the experience of a single person cannot be used as an infallible representation of how the work is being transmitted, the collection of several experiences and analysis of those interpretations, can be helpful to find points of confluence where the experiences meet, asserting the artist’s intention and shedding some light on the elements that make it possible or impede the meaning transmission.

This practice aligns with the hermeneutical point of view, which recognizes the concept of interpretation to be always a situated and historically rooted practice. Therefore, the process of gathering diverse subjective accounts reflects the interpretative process, where understanding evolves through dialogue, merging horizons, and reflections about its context (Foster & Gjesdal, 2019).

In this paper, it is proposed to merge highly detailed methods and frameworks designed for the conservation of various art forms, such as contemporary art and time-based installations, while shifting the focus to the specific needs of sound art and highly interactive works, by taking a structured model that guides the decision-making process surrounding conservation and installation choices, as well as opening up to a new data pool surrounding experience and interaction.

While this data can only be collected during the exhibition of the artwork, the information obtained can be used at various stages of analyzing and understanding the work.

To collect pertinent information from the participants, the gallery, museum, or institution conserving and exhibiting the artwork should plan a series of workshops that allow a space for interaction and conscious contemplation. For this end, it is proposed to follow the subsequent steps:

1. **Work selection.** Ideally, a thorough analysis of the works to be exhibited should be conducted to identify which pieces have elements or qualities that put them at risk of identity loss when reinstalled. For example, space-bound works that were initially created for a specific space, but the artist intends to present them in another context, while maintaining their identity intact.

During this step, it is proposed to follow the decision-making model to establish clear objectives and determine the specific needs of the work within this study. Ensuring a clear understanding of the desired listener experience and the artist's intentions. This process parallels what phenomenology refers to as "intentionality," a directed focus on meaning. Recognizing the artist's intentionality is a key step in a method for identifying the perceptual and experiential goals embedded in the work (Ihde, 2007).

2. **Duration.** The duration of the data gathering process should be established. The participants may interact with the work at least two different times; however, the total duration of the data-gathering process can be as long and exhaustive as the institution desires.

This duration will be determined by several factors, including the complexity of the work, the feasibility of the data gathering strategy to be applied, and the institution's available resources for this process.

3. **Planning workshops.** Workshops should be tailored to the specific needs of the work; however, some basic methods could be implemented to promote deeper engagement with the work.

Activities such as writing, drawing, filming, and photographing should be suggested and encouraged, with the participant registering their personal interactions with the works, as

well as the elements (whether tangible or intangible) that supported their experience. The activity should be explained and guided in a way that provides broad information about the objective. However, at this stage, specific questions should not be given, since they may influence the viewer's interaction with the work.

These methods of reflection insert themselves into a phenomenological-hermeneutic attitude toward the multiplicity of meaning. These exercises help reveal underlying structures of meaning by making the participant reflectively aware of their own perception (Ihde, 2007).

4. **Open call.** As done in *Botaniq*, the art institution can host an open call inviting the public from various backgrounds to participate in an art conservation process, where their input could influence the conservation strategies for that specific piece.

The sign-up process should be conducted through basic questionnaires that gather general information about the participant, which could help the institution decide who should participate in the project. While the institution should determine how many people need to interact with the same artwork, multiple interactors should be selected, considering that a data-gathering process with more subjects will produce a more robust and generalizable result, where connections between the data can be made.

5. **Implementation.** The workshops should be supervised by team members responsible for conducting the study. They should have knowledge of the objectives and dynamics involved in the workshops or solo explorations, as well as being prepared, and have enough understanding to answer any questions that may arise from participants' interactions with the works, without steering them in a particular direction.
6. **Follow-up questionnaire.** At the end of the workshops, once the participants have finished their entries to their personal journals about the works, each individual should be provided with a questionnaire tailored for the needs of the particular work and based on the objective agreed during the work selection and analysis stage, but following a base

discourse that allows to obtain the necessary result regarding the viewers experience and interaction with the sound artwork.

The questions could include the viewers' perceptions on topics such as:

- The perceived meaning of the work
- What the work makes them feel
- Which elements carried more relevance or impact
- The orientation of the works
- The orientation of sound
- The movement of the listener
- Acoustics
- The location of the work
- The relevance of the space in which it was exhibited
- The sound intensity levels
- The presence or absence of vibration

Collecting not only their opinions but also how the diverse elements made them feel and understand the work, tapping into the subjectivity of each individual.

Considering that the auditory experience often surpasses visual perception in intricacy and reflection, the information obtained from the participants' subjectivity potentially contains a multilayered understanding and a more complex descriptive depth. During this data-gathering step, the abundance of possibilities and richness in information should be taken advantage of to analyze and later incorporate into a broader understanding of the work's identity (Ihde, 2007).

7. **Discussion.** A discussion with several participants can be held where knowledge and experiences are shared and exchanged. This discussion can also provide new information that was not expressed in the journals or during the questionnaires, which should also be collected and used during the process of data analysis.

This process fosters a "fusion of horizons," where the experiences and interpretations lived by the participants intersect, allowing the work's identity to emerge through a collective interpretive effort (Foster & Gjesdal, 2019).

8. **Analysis of qualitative and quantitative data.** In this process, a team with thorough knowledge and understanding of the work, as well as the ongoing study, should process and analyze the data set obtained, identifying points of confluence where those subjectivities from different people meet, highlighting values or qualities of the sound installation that resulted decisive to relay the artist's intention.

Subjective and qualitative data should be processed and transformed into quantitative data that can be analyzed statistically to yield a measurable result.

9. **Conclusions.** After processing the data and studying the results related to the transmission of intangible aspects and viewers' experiences, the team can assess its relevance and include the obtained information in the Iteration Report under the viewers' experience specifications. This information should include both raw and processed data, along with a report explaining the process that led to these results. In some cases, the information from this process may also be incorporated into the Identity Report if necessary, serving as evidence and guidance for future reinstallations and analysis.

Acknowledging the complex nature of sound artworks, this proposal intends to combine methodological rigor with the subjective depth that can be obtained from the collection of experiences, drawing from established conservation frameworks, and the interpretive richness of phenomenology and hermeneutics, to achieve a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of artworks that use sound as a means of exploration. Distinguishing itself from other approaches, this proposal seeks to collect the intangible data and subjective experience not from the art professional involved in the project, but from those experiencing the work from outside the biases of the substantial theoretical knowledge on the artwork. Allowing for a recollection of the interpretations resulting from the practice of free listening and offering a new depth of analysis.

This process involves understanding that listening is not a passive act but an embodied, situated practice that has the ability to transform both perception and understanding (Ihde, 2007). By opening the practices surrounding conservation to the lived experiences of the listener or participant, and understanding the transformative role of technology and sound in shaping those experiences, we move towards a more dynamic and responsive practice.

In sync with this way of thinking, the strategies presented in this subchapter aim not only to conserve the physical and technical aspects of sound artworks but also have the potential to safeguard and transmit their experiential and affective identities, considering the intangible layers that emerge only through interaction, reflection, and interpretation.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to consider that while the information obtained from the proposed strategies, which gather subjective experiences, can provide valuable perspectives or information on the perception of certain aspects or characteristics of the work. This information by itself cannot provide a complete picture of the work's identity, but rather of the elements that aid the meaning transmission.

While the information obtained from the viewer's experiences can provide valuable insight into how the work is perceived, it cannot be held as the sole source of truth. This data must be critically assessed and combined with all the existing documentation on the artwork.

CHAPTER IV: *MOMENTUM 13*

During the final chapter, *MOMENTUM* biennale will be presented, including its relevance as an art dissemination platform, as well as the pertinence of this year's biennial, *MOMENTUM 13*, in the context of sound art. The chapter will delve into the connecting theme that was explored during the Sound Biennial and the challenges an event like this presents for the documentation and conservation of sound artworks.

Followed by the ways in which sound art conservation could benefit from the integration of experience gathering strategies to collect the intangible identity that is transmitted to those interacting and experiencing the works, by using *MOMENTUM 13* as a hypothetical study case, mentioning some potential problematics that could arise during its conservation and future reinstallation of works exhibited during the biennial.

4.1. *MOMENTUM 13*

Since its inception in 1998, *MOMENTUM* has been produced and hosted by Galleri F15 in Moss, Norway. The biennial has explored various themes and formats, consistently favoring those that resonate with the social and cultural contexts of the times when they were organized (Søndergaard & Uvaas, 2025). Serving as a discursive platform, *MOMENTUM* fosters intellectual, artistic, and critical reflection that explores and challenges the conventions of the biennial format.

Since its seventh edition, the central venue for *MOMENTUM* has been located on the Jeløy island, creating a closer connection with nature and local cultural history (MOMENTUM, 2025).

The 13th edition of *MOMENTUM: Between/Worlds – Resonant Ecologies* takes place from June 14 to October 12, 2025, and was curated by Morten Søndergaard. This biennial explores sound as an integral form of cultural and artistic expression that invites the audience to listen not only as a sensory experience but also as a means of resistance and transformation.

Through approximately 40 site-specific explorations, *MOMENTUM 13* encourages audiences to attune themselves to the resonant ecologies surrounding them, delving into the resonances between ultra-localities in Moss, and their intersections with global ecological and technological phenomena (Galleri F15, n.d.), including the overlooked or unheard, embodying reorientation through five interconnected yet distinct zones: the Alby Forest (politics of nature), Joløy Island (geological media), the Oslo Fjord (aquatic ecologies), Moss city (urban landscape), and Galleri F15 (institutional mediations). Within these zones, sound-based installations explore sound as a dynamic, as a historically situated force capable of challenging established epistemological and ecological orders (Søndergaard & Uvaas, 2025).

Each zone serves as a space for critically examining ecological interconnections and socio-political histories. These encounters unfold through sound-based artistic practices that emphasize active listening, participatory engagement, and multispecies interactions and recognition (Søndergaard & Uvaas, 2025). The biennial thus calls for a reorientation, a

movement towards an expanded consciousness on matters of the unheard, through embracing practices of situated listening.

MOMENTUM 13 challenges audiences to step into a space of “unprepared listening”. Whether it is through the murmur of the forest, sounds of waves crashing on the shores, or the tumultuous rhythms of a city, the biennial offers a deep reminder of the capacity art has to connect us to the intricate, interdependent webs of existence (Galleri F15, n.d.).

For this edition, *MOMENTUM 13* collaborates with several Nordic and international artists whose practice unfolds through sound, exploring it not only as a medium and through its obvious characteristics, but also through its broadcasting qualities and its ability to connect with the audience on different levels. Employing different approaches, perspectives, and understandings of the practices of listening and the concept of the unheard, artists invite the audience to pause the fast-paced rhythm of life and listen to those entities, either human or non-human, whose voices are not so easily heard. Through different explorations, *MOMENTUM 13* invites the audience to develop a sense of curiosity and increased empathy to connect with realities that might seem distant from the rhythm of everyday life.

Within the biennial, different materialities and levels of complexity get intertwined in a single discourse, offering a rich variety of approaches and perspectives to be explored.

Through the practice of situated listening encouraged by *MOMENTUM 13*, the biennial aims to reorient and reshape the “distribution of the heard,” emphasizing listening as a political act that is essential for initiating meaningful conversations on social justice and ecological crises. Sound, through this practice, becomes a mediator between worlds, connecting the heard and the unheard, the human and the non-human, the visual and the aural, the tangible and the intangible.

4.2. Challenges in the documentation and conservation of sound within the biennial

There are several challenges to consider when thinking about the conservation of art productions in the context of an art biennial organized by an art gallery, given that its purpose shifts towards the production and showcasing of art, while fostering a dialogue with the global art community and attracting diverse audiences, rather than with the conservation and archiving practices.

Regardless of the initial purpose of a biennial, which is not preserving the art productions exhibited during the event, and galleries traditionally focus on art diffusion and art sales, resorting to early conservation and documentation strategies can prevent identity loss after the initial exhibition.

MOMENTUM 13 Between / Worlds: Resonant Ecologies features a wide range of artworks with diverse degrees of materiality and creative objectives. Therefore, tapping into a mixture of strategies to achieve the expression of each work and the artist's intention.

Several means have been used, such as:

- Recorded sound explorations exhibited in audio-visual formats, such as Melia Roger's *Intimacy of Lichens / Intimacy of Stones*, which explores an eco-empathetic listening practice blurring the lines between observer and observed through tactile sonic explorations that channel into the imperceptible vibrations of nature, through an intimate listening experience while using headphones and experiencing the sound close to the ears (Søndergaard & Uvaas, 2025).
- Video recording of a sound installation, such as Christian Boltanski's *Misterios* (2017), a triptych video projection that documents from dawn to sunset, the project was created on an uninhabited coast in Patagonia where three 3-meter-high horns, designed to be activated by strong winds, produce sounds reminiscent of a whale's song, tapping into mythologies involving whales as keepers of knowledge, as well as the passage of time (MOMENTUM, 2025).

- Interactive installations with defined guidelines, such as Brona Martin's soundwalk *MOSS – Mapping Otherworldly Soundscapes*, which explores the different layers within the ecosystem in the Jeløy island, highlighting local histories and the voices of nature. In a half-guided route, following the guidance of the app to find the spread echoes, while also experiencing moments of solo-listening, inviting the listener to move between worlds and form a new sense of ecological awareness (MOMENTUM, 2025).

- Interactive installations without guidelines, such as *FOREST (For a thousand years...)* by Janet Cardiff and Georges Bures Miller, which combines histories unfolding through time, intertwining stories of war, nature, and eerie sounds that invite a reflection over the interlaced existence of ecological resilience and human conflict (Søndergaard & Uvaas, 2025).

- Continuous explorations, such as the case of *Calling the Glacier* by Kalle Aldis Laar, who, since 2007, created a direct connection with the Vernagtferner glacier through a communication system that is part of our everyday life: a telephone line. A microphone in the glacier broadcasts the unedited sounds of the melting glacier in real time. The sounds vary depending on the time of year and season, emphasizing the reality of climate change (Søndergaard & Uvaas, 2025).

- Commissioned works linked to the space, such as JO Kazuhiro's work, *Stay with Others (Moss)*, with recordings made between February 22 and June 12, *Stay with Others* is an intimate sound-based installation where visitors sit in an isolated chair within a field in Moss experiencing echoes from the past merging with present sounds, bridging the gap between presence and memory. Through subtle changes, the audio emanating from past recordings and the current voice of the space addresses liminal states, where an ephemeral soundscape becomes a zone of transition and horizontal reorientation across worlds (MOMENTUM, 2025).

Among other formats, such as seemingly static installations, performative actions, and works integrated with the landscape, which provide a different spectrum of possibilities and, with them, potential vulnerabilities.

While all of them share sound as a medium, a standard research line, a focus of interest, and as a means of exploration, the expressions vary in characteristics, both tangible and intangible, thus possessing different conservation needs.

Each one of the works is different with its own complexities, with challenges that range from technical specifications like the quality of headphones to complications with works made to be space-bound and would lose their identity when moved a different context; opening the discussion of which elements would allow for their reinstallation in other places, and whether its reinstallation is possible and ethical.

This wide variety of approaches and identities makes it difficult to determine a single approach for the documentation and conservation of the works exhibited that would suit the qualities of all the works. While video documentation can capture both the visual and aural elements of the work, the experience and interactive qualities are lost when using this approach, as well as the possible identifications of elements that aid in cementing and transmitting the work's identity.

The conservation and documentation of sound artworks in the context of an art biennial requires of a sensitive, multifaceted approach that recognizes the fluid and often temporary nature of sound-related artistic practices. The richness of art forms, approaches, and conceptual frameworks present in *MOMENTUM 13* highlights not only the richness of contemporary sonic practices but also the fragility of these works and the challenges for their long-term preservation. Evidencing that while traditional documentation strategies can serve as partial ways of obtaining and archiving valuable information, they often fail to fully capture the embodied, situated, and participatory aspects inherent in these works. Therefore, any conservation effort must consider the specifics of each piece, including its material and immaterial components, spatial dependencies, and relational dynamics, while also remaining flexible to the evolving nature of sound as both a medium and an instrument for meaning production. Instead of aiming for a standardized fixed method, what is needed is an adaptive,

dialogue-driven practice that views documentation not as a final goal but as an ongoing process of resonance and care.

Conclusively, addressing these challenges requires a shift from viewing conservation as a static act of preservation toward understanding it as an active engagement with the life of each work. In the context of the biennial format, where artworks are often site-specific, experimental, and ephemeral, documentation must move beyond simply recording to fostering conditions that allow these works to be reimagined, re-experienced, and critically understood in the future. This perspective not only safeguards the integrity of the pieces but also sustains the dialogue between artist, institution, and audience that lies at the heart of the biennial itself.

4.3. Applying strategies: Frank Ekeberg's *Skog og li og bekker forbi*

In this section, the hypothetical application of the proposed strategies will be exemplified using a work presented in the biennial *MOMENTUM 13*, as an illustration of how the developing model could benefit the understanding and future installation of selected works.

Skog og li og bekker forbi

Frank Ekeberg's *Skog og li og bekker forbi* (2025) is a generative sound sculpture, powered by solar panels. Hidden next to the path in the wooden area on the Jeløy island, the work carries voices and melodies that come from a moment where Norwegian folklore was neither a fact nor a fable, a time where the line dividing human and non-human realms was not unambiguous (Ekeberg, 2025).

Skog og li og bekker forbi was created based on the descriptions in Norwegian folklore of a time when a closer relation between humans and the natural world existed. The sound elements present in the work take inspiration from the legends about the *huldfolk*, creatures



Figure 2 - *Skog og li og bekker forbi*, Frank Ekeberg (2025)

that possess magical abilities and embrace a closer connection to nature, and lure people with their beautiful voices. *Skog og li og bekker forbi* (*Forests and hills and streams passed*) exists in an in-between state, connecting human and non-human, legend and reality, and folklore and Norwegian past culture with the current one (Ekeberg, 2025).

1. Work selection

In the hypothetical case that a cultural institution has shown interest in acquiring this particular work as part of their collection, the work is to be reinstalled in a different environment. The artwork should be analyzed to determine if a better understanding of the work could be achieved from the perspective provided by the people interacting with the work.

After establishing that the work could benefit from a thorough analysis and understanding of the implications of its reinstallation, a discussion surrounding the work should be conducted, including several stakeholders in the process.

Establishing general and specific objectives that will guide the decision-making process, as well as identifying risk factors and the work's intention and history.

General objective: Achieve the reinstallation of *Skog og li og bekker forbi*

Specific objectives:

- Install the work as part of the permanent collection of an art institution (possibly outside of Norway)
- Reproduce the work without altering its identity
- Identify the factors in the current installation that aid the experience and make the meaning transmission possible

Key risk factors:

- The work is generative, meaning the conversation with nature is a constant that benefits from a specific type of surrounding.
- Solar-powered system (environment-dependent).
- Site-specific qualities. The installation is meant to exist outdoors and have an interaction with the landscape.
- Connection to Norwegian folklore narratives and the liminal human/non-human realm.

Artist's intention:

The work aims to immerse listeners in a fluid boundary between human culture and natural forces, mediated by folklore. Preserving this experiential ambiguity is central to transmitting the state of being “between” worlds, affected by both recorded sounds and environmental conditions.

2. Duration

In this hypothetical case, the data gathering process will take place over a month, where the people selected to be involved will visit the artwork multiple times (at least two times) and engage with it in various ways.

3. Planning Workshops

The proposed workshops should be tailored to the specific needs of the work. For this installation, as a basic recording task, the participants will be provided with journals and materials to describe their experience through text and drawings.

Workshops:

1. The participants will be asked to create an interpretative video recording of the feelings the artwork evokes in them, documenting the elements of the work or the environment that significantly influence their perspective or understanding of the work's identity.
2. The participants will be asked to reflect and write about their experience encountering and discovering the artwork, focusing on the nuances that have transformed each interaction.

While some activities are planned and required, viewers have the freedom to express themselves through the journals in whatever way and to whatever extent they find necessary.

4. Open Call

The open call will be conducted by the institution currently exhibiting the work, aiming to include the participation of multiple people from the following three background types.

- Locals on the island (no artistic knowledge necessary)
- Visitors who came intending to interact with the exhibition
- Culture workers

The inclusion of people from multiple and diverse backgrounds is done with the objective of having a wide variety of subjectivities and, therefore, perspectives.

5. Implementation

Workshop guidance: Provide brief context about Norwegian folklore without steering participants toward specific interpretations.

Allow solitary listening sessions to let subjective experiences emerge freely.

Team members should answer logistical questions but avoid interpretive influence.

6. Follow-up questionnaire

The participants are asked to answer a follow-up questionnaire tailored to the specific needs of the artwork.

PERCEPTION QUESTIONNAIRE

Frank Ekeberg

Skog og li og bekker forbi (2025)

1. What did the artwork make you feel?
2. Which elements felt the most essential?
3. Do you consider that the orientation or position of the work influenced your interaction with it?
4. Describe your perception of sound
5. Did the installation encourage you to use the space in a specific way?
6. Can you describe the relation between the work and its immediate environment?

7. Do you consider that the space in which it was exhibited holds relevance? If yes, explain how.
8. How would you describe the sound?
9. What did the sound evoke?
10. Did you sense any narrative or mythic presence in the sound?
11. The perceived meaning of the work
12. Were there moments of unpredictability or surprise in how the sound changed?

The questions should be given to the participants to reflect on and transform their experience and subjectivity into concrete words, oriented by specific questions to invite them to consider specific topics.

7. Discussion

A group dialogue will be hosted, where participants share reflections on the boundary between human and non-human elements, looking for overlapping points in the perception of folklore, landscape, and sound technology.

The specific workshops created for this work will be addressed during these sessions. If desired, the participants will have a space to share their videos or texts reflecting on the work, prompting further discussion.

A team member responsible for analyzing the data will lead the discussion, using the various questions from the questionnaire and encouraging the participants to share their opinions and reflections.

The discussion should be recorded in video or sound, with the consent of the participants.

8. Analysis of qualitative and quantitative data

Qualitative data:

The recurring themes in the participants' accounts should be identified, for example, "mystery," "human-nature dialogue," or "environmental influence."

Map soundscape features most frequently cited as meaningful (tone, dynamics, spatiality).

Quantitative:

Count the frequency of specific concepts across participants. For example, how many participants mention the high grass as a fundamental element?

With the quantitative information obtained from the qualitative data, an average is reached and then correlated with the documentation on the identity of the work articulated at the start of the evaluation process, and the information obtained through communications with the artist.

The results obtained will determine elements that, despite not necessarily forming an explicit part of the work, aid the experience and perception of the work.

9. Conclusions

After studying and interpreting the data obtained from the journals, videos, questionnaires, and discussions, the team in charge of the study will reflect on their findings and determine the elements that will answer their initial questions and aid the fulfillment of the initial objectives.

For example, determining as a fixed quality that the work should be installed in a forested area to accurately communicate its identity and achieve the expected experience. As well as establishing the importance of the partially concealed position of the work behind tall grass to disseminate sound in a form of whispers that allows for a feeling of receiving information from an unknown source, a secret, an intimate interaction taking place between human and non-human, between what can be seen and what can be felt.

The results obtained can be registered and used for the following installations in different contexts, while preserving the characteristics that allowed for the identity of the work to be reached through interaction and experience.

By centering the conservation process around the lived experience, this approach shifts the main focus from preserving a series of static physical attributes to preserving the relational and contextual qualities that define a work's identity. In the case of *Skog og li og bekker forbi*, the inclusion of diverse perspectives through workshops, observation, and dialogue reveals which environmental and perceptual elements are essential or of relevance to the work's meaning. These insights could directly inform conservation decisions in each particular case. In this hypothetical study, could mean selecting a similarly forested environment, preserving the solar-powered generative system, or maintaining the work's semi-hidden placement in tall grass, not as arbitrary aesthetic choices but as conditions necessary for the transmission of the artwork's experiential and cultural narrative. Along these lines, conservation thus becomes an adaptive, situated process that aims to consider the fluid and evolving characteristics of sound artworks while ensuring their core identity is preserved across future installations.

4.4. Benefits from integration

In the context of the sound biennial organized by an art gallery, where the collection and preservation of the works is neither planned nor anticipated in the near future, it is natural that there is no active intention to allocate resources on planning strategies for their conservation or focused research on the interaction and experience produced by the works. However, several advantages could result from incorporating experience data gathering strategies into an event with the characteristics of this biennial.

A timely plan for integrating strategies of experience data gathering can help not only with its conservation and the collecting of data that could eventually improve the understanding of the work and possibly its reinstallation in another context, but it could also be implemented in parallel ways to workshops to aid the public's engagement, both international listeners who come to explore and experience the artworks exhibited during the biennial, and locals to the area.

After the exhibition, the information gathered from the inquiry into the viewer's experiences can be interpreted and added to the Iteration Report, to be analyzed during the final assessment, ensuring that the identity of the artwork has been conserved during the installation of that particular iteration of the work. The information gathered can later be used during different stages of the decision-making process to determine the best options for future reinstallation or conservation.

Having the experience information sorted and organized can aid in a new run on the decision-making model. At the **point of departure**, in a hypothetical case where the objective is to reinstall a work that was previously exhibited in a different context, the data on the experience, obtained through workshops, could serve as a base to assess the impact of installation decisions on the reception of the work.

The interpreted data would later form part of the information collected during the **data generation and registration** of the model, allowing for a more detailed source of information on past iterations of the work, and possibly on its identity.

This process would be followed by the analysis of the **current condition**, understanding and enunciating the current material condition of the work, as well as each one of its components, and a detailed description of the installation. This process could be heavily informed by the information obtained and added to the Iteration Report of the work.

Afterward, the **desired state (meaning)** is determined, identifying the work's identity and the elements that are constitutive of the meaning transmission of the work. During this analysis, it is established whether there is a **discrepancy**, or discrepancies, between the work's current state or iteration and its identity; as well as whether there is a discrepancy between the current intention and the reception of the work. In this second analysis, enriched by the data from the participant's experience, it can be identified and determined whether or not the identity of the work was transmitted accurately, and if anything threatens its tangible or intangible stability.

Once the discrepancy is identified, the **conservation/presentation options** are proposed, with each option detailed and evaluated for how effectively they can reduce the discrepancy and transmit the meaning through appropriate changes without altering crucial elements. Afterwards, the different proposals will be examined, taking careful **consideration** of the implications of each one and what they would mean for the final product.

After the **conservation/ presentation strategy** has been determined and **implemented**, the methods for collecting viewers' experiences can be reapplied to gather information on the new iteration. This compiled data helps **assess** if the new iteration stays true to the work's original identity and whether the viewers' experience has been successfully preserved or if any part of it has been altered.

In this sense, the assimilation of the data collected from the audience's experience can become not only a tool for preserving and consciously reinstalling sound artworks, but also a dynamic part of their evolving interpretation. By incorporating these practices or strategies, the biennial could foster a deeper understanding of these works as living, responsive entities. Even in situations where formal collection or long-term conservation is not yet prioritized, systematically gathering and analyzing experiential data ensures that the intangible aspects

of the artworks, such as their identity, meaning, and reception, are not lost but are actively maintained and critically examined in future curatorial and conservation efforts. Systematically collecting and analyzing experiential data adds to the safeguarding of some of the intangible qualities of artworks, such as their identity, meaning, and reception. In this way, the biennial becomes a rich environment not just for exhibiting art, but for research, reflection, and innovation in sound art conservation and interpretation.

However, while the application of the proposed strategies can be highly positive and beneficial for the understanding and conservation of sound art, the methodology faces a series of challenges when introduced into different institutional frameworks, which can make it difficult or entirely impede the collection of data of this nature, from issues related to the resources needed for both the planning and application, to the potential implications of gathering this information.

The application of this method requires a previous analysis and thorough understanding of the work, which implies that the selection cannot be done randomly, but it needs to be carefully researched. This approach may complicate its application on platforms with more stringent time constraints.

While cultural institutions, such as museums, which have prolonged access to the works and a strong interest in maintaining the integrity of the works that form part of their collections, could allocate more time and resources to expanding knowledge and evaluating the integrity of experience-based installations. The application could prove problematic for platforms focused on art diffusion and with limited access to the works.

Moreover, retrieving more information requires assigning resources to process and analyze it, as well as the institutional infrastructure to store it.

Despite of the clear challenges and potential complications of introducing a new working strategy into different cultural environments, several benefits could prove valuable during the analysis and study of sound art, tapping into important qualities for interactive works that are often overlooked and that shape factors such as perception and interpretation.

CONCLUSIONS

The primary motivation behind this research was born from questioning the rate of permanence that works of art with ephemeral or intangible aspects have within collections or art institutions. However, the complexity of some art productions does not stop at the realm of intangibility, but it extends to attributes or aspects that grant them a level of interactivity, creating experiential dynamics that influence the artwork's identity.

This complexity brings to the table the interrogation of the degree of relevance that concepts such as interpretation, experience, embodiment, and meaning have for the integral preservation of art productions that possess this type of intrinsic dynamics.

While in past decades, several institutions and conservation professionals have acknowledged this complexity and the need to preserve elements that extend beyond the work's materiality, focusing also on its intangible aspects and the artist's intentionality, the gap to be bridged involving other stages of the artwork's history remains substantial. This also leads to questioning the depth of the abysmal structure and division of care between cultural institutions focused on collecting and art creation and dissemination platforms.

Although this intricate relationship between complex works and traditional conservation practices applies to an extensive variety of art expressions, this research focuses on sound explorations and sound works, as they are intrinsically experienced and possess a higher degree of interpretative action.

Whilst conservation has a vast research on sound and its preservation, the strategies proposed for its preservation are mainly focused exclusively on their recording and migration, making the material aspects of sound the focal point of the conservation actions surrounding them. However, that leaves out the experiential dimensions that, on many occasions, form part of the identity of sound art.

This research was then developed with the **objective** of *proposing ways of integrating data-gathering strategies focused on capturing the viewer's experience into a structured model for the analysis and conservation of art that can become the starting point for the development*

of a hybrid model focused on the preservation of sound art installations, integrating theoretical, material, and audience-experiential dimensions, in order to enhance the understanding, documentation, exhibition, preservation, and potential reproduction of these complex, ephemeral artworks

A hybrid approach can improve our understanding of sound artworks by tapping into the viewers' subjectivities and inviting the research around sound art conservation to focus on the recognition of elements that, despite not being named as fundamental elements of the work, carry a high relevance for the transmission of meanings and how the work is experienced and understood.

The knowledge gained from gathering viewers' experiences can provide diverse types of subjective information from different individual interactions. This information can be interpreted, analyzed, and converted into specific data that can then form part of a statistical study used to determine the relevance and the degree to which multiple aspects of an installation are working adequately, as well as how a specific iteration of an installation stays true to the work's identity.

The information obtained during this process can be used to create a new model for sound art analysis by including a step in the decision-making process that adds a deeper layer of understanding over intangible elements and qualities. The proposed method can serve as a starting point for developing a comprehensive framework that focuses on the experiential dimensions of sound, becoming a valuable tool for the integral conservation of not only sound art, but also of several complex works that share similar traits.

The potential creation of a new model that focuses on experiential and interpretative aspects of the sound artworks has the capability of improving the understanding, preservation, archiving, exhibition, and reproduction of complex artworks with ephemeral aspects and experience-based operations by making a new data set available, reaching to subjective aspects not from a strictly theoretical or historical viewpoint, obtained through interviews to the artists or curators and research about the work's history, but also from a practical sense, where the ones experiencing the work have a voice and the ability to communicate how their interaction and experience was influenced from multiple factors surrounding a sound art

installation, such as the space, distribution, or even the technologies used for the work to communicate its identity, or the ones available to mediate the experience.

This study supports the **hypothesis** that *a hybrid approach, integrating not only theoretical and material analysis but also the audience's experiences, can enhance the understanding of sound art installations and lead to the development of a new model for their analysis, aiding the preservation, exhibition, and reproduction of sound artworks by capturing both their material and experiential dimensions through thorough and integral documentation.*

The research on sound begins with a phenomenological approach, following a style of thinking that focuses on a profound examination of experience as a complex and multifaceted process (Ihde, 2007), which sheds light on concepts that can only be reached through subjectivity and situated interaction, as well as the analysis and interpretation of said knowledge, following the hermeneutical belief that human experience, including art, demands interpretation.

The concept of interpretation in this method, then, becomes multilayered. Starting with the interpretation that takes place when the listener interacts with the work, where they transform the sensorial experience and interaction into knowledge, and the second layer of interpretation that unfolds when the obtained data from subjective experiences is processed and interpreted by a team of experts. This process requires a comprehensive understanding of the work, the context in which it was created, as well as the context in which it is being exhibited at the moment (Foster & Gjesdal, 2019). The team involved should have the capability of having a critical approach to the information obtained and be aware of the position where the interpretation is taking place.

While this is the first step in a method that focuses on the conservation of sound art, using the collection of experiences and subjectivities as a preservation strategy, it has the potential to provide another layer of research and depth to the documentation and understanding of complex qualities within sound art. However, the method remains hypothetical and requires further research and trials to gain a clear understanding of the extent to which this approach

can be applied and prove valuable in the regular conservation and documentation practice within and outside cultural and artistic institutions.

While the method proposed in this research can potentially aid in many ways the understanding of complex works and have a positive impact on the preservation of sound art, some challenges need to be addressed when proposing such a method that involves gathering data from outside the cultural or artistic institutions. The application of the proposed approach or a more developed method born from this strategy would require multiple resources, both human and economic, that could impede its wide application in art institutions that already struggle with limited budgets. The project would also require detailed planning and time dedicated for the different stages of the method application; from the previous research and analysis that will lead to the selection of the works, the creation of specific questionnaires for each work, the participant call and selection, the workshops and conversations with the audience, as well as the analysis and interpretation of the data to reach conclusions.

In the specific case of *MOMENTUM 13*, many of the works that form part of the sound biennial could benefit from an expanded understanding of the experiential dimensions that surround some sound artworks, not only as a conservation resource that brings that information to use as an ethical preservation strategy, but also as an immediate resource for assessing the impact over the installation decisions, and as a dissemination and engagement strategy with the public through the workshops applied for the experience data gathering. However, while positive outcomes can derive from the application of such a method in the context of art dissemination platforms, like the biennial format, the application of active research and conservation strategies can be challenging since direct cost-benefit is not as favorable as it would be in the case of an art or cultural institution that has sound artworks as part of their collection and has as an objective not only studying but preserving them.

The development and application of strategies to gather and interpret viewers' experiences could reshape how sound art is understood, documented, and preserved. By finding value in the audience's embodied and subjective interactions with sound installations, this approach

proposes a paradigm shift to one that allows for the recognition of experience and subjectivity as a core component of the artwork's identity, not merely a collateral effect. While the hybrid method proposed in this thesis remains in its early stages and requires further development, it opens the conversation for a more integral conservation practice that embraces the ephemeral, the experiential, and the interpretative as valid and valuable data, which has the capacity of informing both current exhibition strategies and long-term preservation efforts.

Further research to expand on this study could focus on verifying the practical application of this hybrid method in diverse institutional settings, testing how viable it is in each of them, and the specific challenges it faces in contexts such as museums, biennials, and independent art spaces. Pilot applications of the model could assess how subjective data obtained from audiences can be integrated into existing documentation systems or used to guide conservation decisions. This information could also be used to examine how this data influences the perceived continuity of an artwork's identity across multiple installations or contexts.

This research and proposed method aims to not only bridge the existing gaps within conservation methodology and approach but also to advocate for a model of care that acknowledges and respects the full complexity of sound art as a living, interactive, and evolving art form. By recognizing subjectivity as a legitimate angle of understanding meaning and transmission, the proposed approach aligns with an ethical stance that seeks to preserve not just the artwork but its integrity through the experience that it produces. This includes the feedback and engagement of audiences, factors that are often overlooked despite of being potentially influential in analyzing the meaning transmission experience-based works. In doing so, it strengthens the position of conservation as a practice of cultural empathy and attentiveness.

This research and proposed method aims to not only bridge the existing gaps within conservation methodology and approach but also to advocate for a model of care that acknowledges and respects the full complexity of sound art as a living, interactive, and evolving art form.

This study suggests a redefinition of the conservation practice, moving away from the idea of the discipline as a static act of material preservation, but as a dynamic, interpretative practice that listens as much to the artwork as to the ones interacting with it. In doing so, it seeks to initiate a necessary evolution in how institutions engage with complex, living artworks like sound installations, transforming the conservation process into a resonant event that listens and is continually re-engaged, thoughtfully adapted, and preserves meaning as much as an object.

Beyond the immediate context of sound art, the proposed hybrid model holds broader implications for conservation institutions, policy development, and future research. By urging for the integration of experiential and interpretative data into conservation practices, this approach can serve as a foundational framework for dealing with other forms of interactive media art that also resist traditional material-focused methodologies. Works involving augmented reality, virtual environments, live data feeds, or participatory elements that similarly demand a reconsideration of how meaning is transmitted, perceived, and preserved.

Conservation institutions may consider policy adaptations that formally incorporate subjective audience feedback and lived interaction data into their documentation and conservation protocols. This would require a shift in institutional priorities, potentially fostering a new dimension to the interdisciplinary collaborations between artists, conservators, curators, media theorists, data analysts, and user experience researchers. However, it also raises important ethical and practical considerations and concerns around audience involvement, data privacy, and the representativeness of experiences.

The proposed model reveals potential paths for cross-institutional studies and for the potential application of pilot programs aimed at testing experiential data collection in various cultural settings. Through comparative studies, the impact of this method across different forms of interactive and experience-based works could be examined, assessing how well it supports continuity of meaning and identity in variable exhibition contexts. This could eventually lead to the establishment of standards or tools for integrating subjective,

phenomenological dimensions into regular conservation practices, not as supplementary data, but as essential components of the artwork's integrity.

In essence, this research could not only potentially contribute to the ongoing discourse and research surrounding sound art conservation, but also encourage a broader re-evaluation of what conservation means in the context of an age of interactivity and participation. Urging institutions to listen, not only to the artwork but also to its audiences, and in doing so, transform conservation into a truly responsive and inclusive practice.

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