

Musical Materials as Cultural Artefacts: Towards a Tangible– Intangible Typology

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Abstract

This study addressed the persistent problem that musical artefacts are often defined narrowly as physical objects - a limitation that requires urgent attention as musical heritage increasingly expands across digital, embodied, and transnational contexts. It examined this gap by analysing a curated corpus of 120 musical materials using a conceptual–analytical design informed by material culture theory, intangible heritage studies, and ethnomusicology. The analysis identified three interconnected categories of musical artefacts and found that 42 percent of the corpus functioned as tangible forms, 33 percent as intangible, and 25 percent as hybrid materials. These findings indicated that musical artefactuality operates along a continuum shaped by materiality, performance, and mediation. The study developed a typology that clarified definitional ambiguity, integrated material and immaterial perspectives, and provided a structured basis for analysing diverse musical materials. The typology advances current debates on musical materiality by offering a coherent analytical structure for interpreting diverse forms of musical heritage and supports more inclusive archival and heritage practices that better reflect the realities of contemporary cultural production.

Keywords: cultural artefacts; intangible; musical materials; tangible; typology

Introduction

Across the humanities and social sciences, the concept of artefact has long been associated with physical objects recovered through excavation, preserved in museums, or circulated as material evidence of past human activity. Classical definitions in archaeology and material culture studies emphasise tangibility, durability, and physical form as the primary criteria for artefactuality (Hodder, 2012; Meskell, 2021). This material bias has shaped scholarly assumptions about what constitutes legitimate cultural evidence, reinforcing the view that artefacts must be concrete objects that can be touched, stored, and displayed. Yet contemporary cultural production increasingly exceeds these boundaries, and many forms of human creativity, particularly in music, circulate as performances, sounds, and digital traces rather than as physical objects. Despite this shift, the conceptualisation of artefacts has not kept pace with the realities of cultural practice.

A growing body of scholarship challenges the materialist orientation of artefact theory by foregrounding the significance of intangible cultural forms. UNESCO's framework on Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) argues that songs, oral traditions, ritual performances, and embodied practices constitute vital repositories of cultural knowledge and identity (UNESCO, 2017). Ethnomusicology similarly recognises musical sound, performance conventions, and oral transmission as culturally encoded systems that function as evidence of social meaning (Nettl, 2015; Stokes, 2020). Digital humanities scholars extend this argument by demonstrating that digital recordings, media clips, and online musical traces operate as artefacts within networked cultural ecologies (Sterne, 2021). Although these fields converge in acknowledging the evidentiary power of intangible forms, they rarely articulate a unified conceptual framework for understanding such materials as artefacts. This conceptual ambiguity limits how musical evidence is archived, interpreted, and mobilised in cultural analysis, creating inconsistencies in how scholars treat musical materials as sources of knowledge.

This tension is particularly evident in the treatment of musical materials. While manuscripts, instruments, and notated scores are readily accepted as artefacts, songs, chants, jingles, performance practices, and digital audio remain conceptually marginal. Their status oscillates between performance, text, and event, producing ambiguity about whether they qualify as artefacts or merely as ephemeral expressions. Scholars acknowledge that musical materials encode memory, identity, and social meaning (Agawu, 2016; Turino, 2018), yet the field lacks a systematic typology that positions these materials within the broader landscape of artefactuality. This gap restricts the analytical possibilities available to musicologists, heritage

scholars, and cultural theorists, and obscures the methodological implications of treating musical materials as cultural evidence.

This study addresses this gap by conceptualising, categorising, and theorising musical materials as tangible, intangible, and hybrid artefacts. It asks three interrelated questions: What constitutes an artefact in contemporary cultural scholarship? How can musical materials be systematically categorised as artefacts? Which theoretical and methodological frameworks best support this categorisation? By triangulating material culture theory, intangible heritage studies, and ethnomusicological theories of musical objects, the study develops a typology that clarifies the artefactual status of musical materials and provides a conceptual foundation for their analysis. The typology developed in this study offers the first integrated framework for understanding musical materials as artefacts across tangible, intangible, and hybrid domains, thereby advancing both conceptual precision and analytical practice.

The significance of this intervention extends beyond music scholarship. By reconceptualising artefacts to include sonic, performative, and digital materials, the study challenges entrenched materialist assumptions and expands the epistemic scope of artefact theory. It offers a framework with implications for ethnomusicology, heritage studies, material culture, and digital humanities, particularly in contexts where cultural knowledge is transmitted orally or embodied in performance. The paper proceeds by tracing the conceptual instability of the term artefact, developing a triangulated theoretical framework, outlining a rigorous methodological approach, and presenting a typology that integrates tangible, intangible, and hybrid musical forms. In doing so, it opens a new conceptual space for understanding how musical materials function as cultural artefacts and sets the stage for further theoretical and methodological innovations.

Literature Review

Across archaeology, anthropology, museum studies, and material culture, the term artefact has traditionally been anchored in assumptions of physicality, durability, and material presence. Archaeological definitions emphasise objects fashioned or modified by human hands, privileging tangibility as the primary criterion for evidentiary legitimacy (Renfrew and Bahn 2016). Material culture theorists similarly foreground the social lives of objects, arguing that artefacts mediate human relationships, identities, and histories through their physical form (Hodder 2012; Tilley et al. 2021). Museum studies reinforce this orientation by institutionalising artefacts as curated, conserved, and displayed objects whose value is tied to their material stability (Macdonald 2019). These disciplinary perspectives collectively

highlight how deeply materiality has shaped the conceptual foundations of artefact theory, even as scholars acknowledge that cultural meaning often exceeds physical form.

The emergence of Intangible Cultural Heritage frameworks has broadened this landscape by foregrounding oral, performative, and embodied cultural forms. UNESCO's 2003 Convention asserts that songs, rituals, oral traditions, and performance practices constitute heritage in their own right, not merely as adjuncts to physical objects (UNESCO 2017). Heritage scholars argue that intangible forms carry memory, identity, and social knowledge that cannot be reduced to material artefacts (Kurin 2014; Hafstein 2018), while ethnographic studies demonstrate that oral and aural traditions function as repositories of cultural epistemologies with significant social value (Noyes 2016). Although this scholarship expands what counts as cultural evidence, it often positions intangible heritage as a parallel category rather than integrating it into artefact discourse, leaving unresolved how such forms might be conceptualised alongside tangible objects.

Ethnomusicology provides further insight by treating music as cultural text, performance, object, and practice. Scholars emphasise that musical materials encode social meaning, identity, and memory, functioning as cultural texts that can be analysed for their symbolic and communicative properties (Agawu 2016; Stokes 2020). Performance studies highlight the embodied and relational nature of musical practice, challenging object centred approaches (Small 1998; Turino 2018), while musicological work on notation and manuscripts treats scores as material artefacts that mediate musical knowledge (Cook 2018). These perspectives illuminate the multiple ways musical materials operate within cultural systems, yet they remain theoretically fragmented, with songs, chants, and performance conventions variously conceptualised as texts, practices, or events rather than as artefacts.

Digital humanities scholarship further complicates traditional notions of artefacts by foregrounding digital recordings, online archives, and media traces as cultural objects. Scholars argue that digital files, audio recordings, and online performances constitute artefacts within networked cultural ecosystems, carrying evidentiary and interpretive value comparable to physical objects (Sterne 2021; van Dijck 2013). Digital archives increasingly treat sound recordings, media clips, and born-digital materials as primary sources, challenging assumptions that artefacts must possess fixed material form (Terras et al. 2018). At the same time, the instability, reproducibility, and fluid materiality of digital objects raise questions about authenticity, durability, and the criteria by which digital musical materials should be categorised.

These disciplinary streams offer valuable but largely siloed insights. Material culture theory provides a vocabulary for artefactuality but remains grounded in physical form. Intangible heritage scholarship expands the domain of cultural evidence but does not fully integrate intangible forms into artefact theory. Ethnomusicology highlights the cultural significance of musical materials without offering a unified framework for their categorisation. Digital humanities extends artefact discourse into virtual environments while exposing new conceptual tensions. Across these literatures, three interrelated issues become evident: the absence of a unified typology for musical artefacts; inconsistent criteria for determining artefactual status; and insufficient theoretical grounding for understanding intangible musical materials as artefacts. These issues limit the analytical integration of musical evidence into broader cultural and heritage studies.

Addressing these limitations requires a conceptual synthesis that brings together material culture theory, intangible heritage studies, ethnomusicology, and digital humanities. This study responds to that need by proposing an integrated framework that reconceptualises musical materials as tangible, intangible, and hybrid artefacts, thereby advancing theoretical clarity and analytical practice.

Theoretical Framework

The conceptualisation of musical materials as artefacts requires a theoretical foundation capable of accommodating both their material and immaterial dimensions. Material culture theory provides an essential starting point by positioning artefacts as meaning-bearing entities that mediate social relations, identities, and cultural memory (Hodder 2012). Within this tradition, artefacts function as nodes within networks of human practice, shaped by and shaping the cultural worlds in which they circulate. Tangibility, durability, and embodiment offer a vocabulary for understanding how physical musical objects such as instruments, manuscripts, and notated scores acquire significance. Yet this emphasis on material form also exposes the limits of the framework, which struggles to account for musical expressions that do not manifest as stable physical objects, including songs, chants, and performance practices. Material culture theory is, therefore, necessary but insufficient for theorising musical artefacts.

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) theory extends this foundation by foregrounding oral, performative, and embodied traditions. The UNESCO Convention conceptualises intangible heritage as knowledge transmitted through performance, ritual, and collective memory rather than through physical objects (UNESCO 2017). This perspective legitimises musical practices, oral repertoires, and ritual soundscapes as heritage in their own right, emphasising their role in sustaining

identity and social continuity (Hafstein 2018). It also provides a language for understanding how musical knowledge is reproduced through participation and communal enactment. However, ICH theory tends to position intangible heritage as a parallel category rather than integrating it into artefact discourse, leaving unresolved how such forms might be theorised alongside material objects.

Ethnomusicology offers a third strand of conceptual support by treating music as object, text, event, and practice. Scholars argue that musical materials encode cultural meaning and social knowledge in the form of notated scores, performance conventions, and sonic events (Agawu 2016; Cook 2018). This perspective recognises that musical objects include performances, recordings, and embodied practices that function as culturally meaningful entities. Ethnomusicology, therefore, bridges the conceptual space between object and event, yet it rarely frames these materials explicitly as artefacts. The field provides a rich vocabulary for describing musical phenomena but does not offer a unified framework for categorising them within artefact theory.

Together, these traditions offer complementary but incomplete perspectives. Material culture theory provides the language of artefactuality but remains tied to physical form. Intangible cultural heritage theory expands the domain of cultural evidence but lacks mechanisms for integrating immaterial forms into artefact discourse. Ethnomusicology highlights the cultural significance of musical materials as objects and practices but does not resolve their ambiguous artefactual status. A triangulated synthesis of these frameworks is therefore necessary to conceptualise musical artefacts in ways that are sensitive to material, performative, and sonic dimensions. This integrated position provides a comprehensive foundation for analysing musical materials as tangible, intangible, and hybrid artefacts.

This theoretical synthesis underpins the typology developed in the subsequent sections. It enables musical materials to be conceptualised not on the basis of physicality alone but through their cultural function, evidentiary value, and role in mediating social meaning. It also provides the rationale for a framework that recognises the interplay of material, performative, and sonic dimensions, laying the conceptual groundwork for the methodological approach and the typology that follows.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, conceptually driven research design supported by systematic artefact analysis, with the aim of theorising musical materials as tangible, intangible, and hybrid artefacts while grounding the typology in a clearly defined

empirical corpus. A total of 120 musical materials were curated to capture a wide range of musical traditions, media formats, and transmission modes. This number was selected to ensure representativeness across categories and to reach analytical saturation, the point at which additional items no longer introduced new artefactual characteristics.

The corpus included 38 notated scores and manuscripts, such as European classical scores, Anglican hymnals, West African art music manuscripts, and jazz lead sheets, alongside 32 audio recordings, including field recordings of Ewe drumming, Yoruba *oríki*, African American spirituals, jazz improvisations, and contemporary digital tracks. It also comprised 28 orally transmitted items, such as chants, praise poetry, ritual soundscapes, and children's songs, as well as 22 digital or multimedia items, including online performance videos, digitised archival recordings, and annotated digital scores. These materials represented diverse cultural contexts, including West African (Yoruba, Ewe, Hausa, Igbo), European classical and liturgical traditions (medieval chant, Baroque and Classical repertoire, Anglican hymnody), African American musical forms (spirituals, gospel, jazz), and global contemporary digital cultures. This diversity enabled the analysis to reflect multiple modes of musical knowledge production and transmission, encompassing material transmission through scores and instruments, oral and performative transmission through chants and improvisation, and mediated transmission through digital recordings and audiovisual documentation.

Items were included if they represented a recognisable musical practice, object, or sonic event, demonstrated cultural or documentary significance, were accessible through public archives or open access platforms, and provided sufficient contextual information for artefactual analysis. Items lacking provenance, cultural meaning, or archival grounding were excluded.

The analysis proceeded through conceptual refinement, in which definitions of artefact from material culture theory, intangible cultural heritage studies, and ethnomusicology were synthesised; artefactual coding, in which each item was assessed for material, performative, and mediated characteristics; and comparative interpretation, which examined patterns in cultural function, evidentiary value, and modes of transmission. Technical tools were used only to organise and track coding decisions, ensuring that the methodological emphasis remained on interpretive depth rather than procedural detail, and that the empirical work supported rather than overshadowed the study's conceptual contribution.

Table 1. Representative examples from the 120-item corpus, summarising the range of musical materials analysed across item types, cultural origins, media, historical periods, artefact classifications, and source archives.

Item Type	Cultural Origin	Medium	Date/Period	Classification Category	Source Archive
Notated score	European classical	Paper	1800s	Tangible	IMSLP
Talking drum	West African	Instrument	20th c.	Tangible	National Museum Lagos
Oriki chant	Yoruba	Oral performance	Contemporary	Intangible	Field recording archive
Jazz improvisation	African American	Audio recording	1950s	Hybrid	Smithsonian Folkways
Gregorian chant	Catholic monastic	Oral/notation	Medieval	Intangible	Vatican Library
Digital performance video	Global	Online media	2020s	Hybrid	Open-access digital platform

Typology of Artefacts

Purpose and Scope of the Typology

The typology developed in this study provides a structured and theoretically grounded system for classifying musical materials as tangible, intangible, or hybrid artefacts. It emerges directly from the triangulated theoretical foundations established earlier and from the multi-stage analytical procedures outlined in the methodology. Its purpose is to offer a coherent and transferable conceptual framework capable of capturing the diverse ways in which musical knowledge, practice, and cultural meaning are materialised, enacted, and transmitted. By articulating clear criteria for each category and applying them consistently to the curated corpus, the typology addresses longstanding conceptual ambiguities surrounding artefactuality in musical contexts and establishes a foundation for the interpretive analyses that follow.

Conceptual Foundations of the Typology

The typology is anchored in three complementary theoretical traditions. Material culture theory positions artefacts as meaning-bearing objects embedded in social relations and cultural memory (Hodder, 2012). Intangible cultural heritage theory expands the domain of cultural evidence to include oral, performative, and embodied traditions that do not rely on physical form (UNESCO, 2017). Ethnomusicology provides conceptual tools for recognising musical materials as objects, events, and practices that encode cultural knowledge (Cook, 2018). These traditions collectively

supply the conceptual scaffolding for distinguishing between material, immaterial, and hybrid forms of musical artefactuality. The typology, therefore, reflects a synthesis of established theoretical insights while offering a new, integrated framework for their application.

Tangible Musical Artefacts

Tangible musical artefacts are physical objects whose cultural significance is embedded in their material form. They possess stable, durable, and examinable properties that allow them to function as long-term repositories of musical knowledge. Their classification in this study rests on three explicit criteria - they must exist as physical objects, retain their form independent of performance, and encode cultural meaning through material features (such as craftsmanship, inscription, or wear). A clear example is the Nigerian talking drum - a carved wooden instrument with a leather membrane and tension cords. Its physical construction, decorative motifs, and signs of use provide evidence of the musical, linguistic, and social practices associated with Yoruba drumming traditions. Although its performance is intangible, the drum itself remains a durable cultural object that can be preserved, displayed, and analysed.

A medieval chant manuscript offers another illustration of tangible artefactuality. Written on vellum with neumatic notation, such manuscript preserve the visual and material traces of monastic musical practice. The ink, script style, page layout, and marginal annotations provide insights into liturgical pedagogy and the transmission of sacred repertoire. The manuscript qualifies as a tangible artefact because its cultural meaning is inseparable from its physical form, which has endured across centuries. Similarly, a nineteenth-century Anglican hymnbook exemplifies material artefactuality through its printed pages, binding, and traces of congregational use. Ownership inscriptions, page wear, and printing techniques reveal patterns of devotional life and communal singing. The hymnbook remains a stable object that preserves musical and theological knowledge even when not in use.

A handwritten jazz lead sheet further demonstrates the tangible category. The paper, handwriting style, harmonic annotations, and corrections capture the creative process of the musician who produced it. These material features document interpretive decisions and improvisational frameworks that cannot be inferred from performance alone. The lead sheet qualifies as a tangible artefact because its evidentiary value lies in its physical characteristics, which preserve aspects of musical thought and practice in a fixed, examinable form.

Taken together, the above examples demonstrate how tangible artefacts occupy the material end of the typological continuum and provide a stable reference point for distinguishing intangible and hybrid forms.

Intangible Musical Artefacts

Intangible musical artefacts are characterised by their dependence on performance, oral transmission, and embodied enactment rather than on fixed material form. They persist through repetition, memory, and social participation, emerging as cultural practices that are enacted rather than stored. Yoruba *oríki* praise chants performed in ceremonial contexts exemplify this category, as their meaning is carried through vocal delivery, poetic improvisation, and situational responsiveness rather than through any written or material record. Similarly, Gregorian chant traditions sustained within monastic communities rely on collective memory, vocal discipline, and ritual continuity, demonstrating how musical knowledge can be preserved through embodied practice. Call-and-response structures in African-American spirituals further illustrate intangible artefactuality, as their cultural significance lies in participatory performance, communal interaction, and the transmission of shared historical experience. Improvised jazz practices transmitted through apprenticeship rather than notation also fall within this category, since their core musical ideas are learned through listening, imitation, and embodied engagement. These forms encode cultural meaning through sonic qualities, gesture, and contextual enactment, allowing them to convey social identity, collective memory, and cultural continuity without reliance on material objects.

Although intangible artefacts are inherently dynamic and may vary across performances, they retain recognisable structures, functions, and stylistic markers within their cultural settings. Their classification as artefacts affirms that cultural knowledge can be preserved, transmitted, and analysed even in the absence of physical embodiment, a principle central to intangible heritage theory (UNESCO, 2017).

Hybrid Musical Artefacts

Hybrid musical artefacts combine material and immaterial dimensions in ways that make neither aspect analytically separable. Their defining feature is the interdependence of physical substrates and performative or sonic elements, resulting in forms of musical evidence that cannot be understood through material or intangible characteristics alone. Digital audio recordings, such as field recordings of Ewe drumming archived in the Smithsonian Folkways collection, exemplify this hybridity. Although the recording exists as a digital file stored on a physical medium, its cultural significance lies in the sonic event it captures, the performance context it

documents, and the interpretive possibilities it preserves. Annotated scores used in live performance also function as hybrid artefacts. The physical score provides a material foundation, while the interpretive markings inscribed by performers embody tacit knowledge, rehearsal histories, and embodied decision-making that exceed the written notation.

Multimedia ritual practices offer another example, integrating sound, gesture, and visual symbolism in ways that rely simultaneously on material objects, embodied performance, and sensory experience. Audiovisual documentation of performances, such as recordings of the BBC Proms, similarly demonstrates hybridity by combining the materiality of the recording medium with the ephemerality of live performance. In each case, the artefact's evidentiary value emerges from the interplay between its physical form and the intangible musical practices it mediates. Hybrid artefacts, therefore, occupy a conceptual middle ground, illustrating how musical materials often resist strict categorisation, and how contemporary musical transmission increasingly depends on mediated forms of cultural expression. Their recognition as a distinct category reflects the growing importance of digital and technologically mediated practices in shaping musical heritage and cultural memory (van Dijck, 2013).

Cross-Category Distinctions and Overlaps

Although the three categories are analytically distinct, they exhibit areas of overlap that reflect the complexity of musical artefactuality. Tangible artefacts may acquire intangible dimensions through performance practices associated with their use, while intangible artefacts may become partially materialised through documentation or recording. Hybrid artefacts often emerge precisely at these intersections, where material and immaterial elements converge. The typology accommodates these fluid boundaries by providing clear criteria for classification while recognising that artefactual forms may shift across contexts. This flexibility ensures that the typology remains sensitive to the diverse ways in which musical materials function within cultural systems.

Analytical Utility of the Typology

The typology offers significant analytical value by clarifying the artefactual status of musical materials that are often conceptually ambiguous. It resolves the inconsistencies identified in the literature by providing a coherent framework that integrates material, performative, and sonic dimensions. It also supports the methodological procedures of the study by offering a transparent and replicable basis for categorising items within the corpus. By distinguishing between tangible, intangible, and hybrid artefacts, the typology enables more precise interpretation of

how musical materials encode cultural meaning, circulate within communities, and contribute to heritage formation.

Transferability and Theoretical Contribution

Beyond its application to the present corpus, the typology is transferable to other cultural domains in which material and immaterial forms intersect. It contributes to broader debates in artefact theory, cultural heritage studies, and ethnomusicology by demonstrating that artefactuality need not be limited to physical objects. Instead, it offers a multi-layered conceptualisation that reflects the complexity of contemporary cultural production and transmission. The typology thus represents a substantive theoretical contribution, providing a structured and adaptable framework for future research.

Findings

The findings presented below respond directly to the study's three research questions by demonstrating how musical materials function as tangible, intangible, and hybrid artefacts within the proposed typological framework. The analysis of the 120 musical materials revealed a clear distribution across the three artefact categories, demonstrating how musical evidence is shaped by materiality, performance, and mediation. Of the total corpus, 42 percent (n = 50) were classified as tangible artefacts, 33 percent (n = 40) as intangible artefacts, and 25 percent (n = 30) as hybrid artefacts. These proportions reflect the archival dominance of material objects, the continued vitality of orally transmitted traditions, and the growing influence of digital mediation in contemporary musical cultures. The following subsections present the key findings for each category, beginning with the central takeaway before elaborating on the supporting evidence.

Tangible Musical Artefacts

The analysis shows that tangible musical artefacts function as the most stable and materially inscribed repositories of musical knowledge within the corpus. Their defining strength lies in their durability and capacity for long-term preservation, which enable them to serve as fixed points of reference for reconstructing musical practices and historical contexts. This category included manuscripts, printed scores, instruments, archival documents, and physical media, all of which exhibited clear material boundaries and storability. For example, the first edition of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5* (1809) demonstrates how printed notation encodes compositional intention, while manuscripts such as Fela Sowande's organ works reveal layers of revision and personal authorship. Instruments such as the Yoruba dundun drum preserved in the National Museum of Lagos embody both craftsmanship and cultural symbolism, offering insight into performance practice through their physical wear

patterns. Archival documents, including nineteenth-century hymnals and missionary songbooks, further illustrate historical transmission routes and cultural encounters.

Across the corpus, tangible artefacts consistently displayed high evidentiary value due to their reproducibility and material stability. They allowed researchers to trace stylistic evolution, examine socio-historical contexts, and analyse the material conditions of musical production. However, the findings also indicate that tangible artefacts capture only a partial representation of musical experience, often omitting the sonic, embodied, and performative dimensions that define many traditions. Their stability, while analytically useful, can obscure the fluidity and variability inherent in musical practice. These limitations underscore the need to interpret tangible artefacts alongside intangible and hybrid forms to achieve a comprehensive understanding of musical artefactuality.

Intangible Musical Artefacts

The analysis indicates that intangible musical artefacts serve as dynamic, socially embedded carriers of cultural memory, identity, and embodied knowledge. Their defining characteristic is their reliance on performance, oral transmission, and contextual enactment rather than on fixed material form. This category includes songs, chants, jingles, performance practices, improvisational traditions, and orally transmitted repertoires. Yoruba *oríkì* praise chants, for instance, demonstrate how genealogical memory and social identity are encoded through vocal performance rather than written documentation. Gregorian chant traditions sustained through monastic repetition illustrate how musical continuity is maintained through collective memory and ritual enactment. Improvisational jazz practices transmitted through apprenticeship further highlight the centrality of tacit knowledge in musical transmission.

Across the corpus, intangible artefacts displayed strong cultural encoding through their sonic qualities, gestural vocabularies, and contextual specificity. Their evidentiary value lies in their ability to reveal social relationships, ritual functions, and community-based knowledge systems. Unlike tangible artefacts, which remain fixed once produced, intangible artefacts evolve across performances, allowing them to reflect contemporary social dynamics while maintaining recognisable structural features. The analysis also revealed that intangible artefacts are vulnerable to loss when transmission chains are disrupted, underscoring the importance of documentation and community-based preservation. These findings affirm the need to recognise intangible forms as legitimate artefacts in their own right rather than treating them as secondary to material evidence.

Hybrid Musical Artefacts

The analysis demonstrates that hybrid musical artefacts occupy a conceptual middle ground, combining material and immaterial dimensions in ways that make neither aspect analytically separable. Their value lies in their ability to bridge the gap between material stability and performative dynamism. This category included digital recordings of oral traditions, annotated scores used in live performance, transcriptions of chants, and media artefacts that combine physical and digital forms. For example, digital audio recordings of Ewe drumming from the Smithsonian Folkways collection capture the sonic and performative qualities of the tradition while relying on digital storage formats for preservation. Annotated scores used in live performance, such as conductor’s marked copies of Handel’s *Messiah*, embody both material notation and embodied interpretive knowledge. Transcriptions of chants, including field notations of Yoruba ritual music, translate ephemeral sonic events into material form while inevitably shaping their interpretation.

Hybrid artefacts consistently demonstrated high analytical value by providing access to sonic and embodied dimensions that tangible artefacts cannot capture, while offering a degree of fixity absent from purely intangible forms. However, the analysis also revealed that hybrid artefacts introduce interpretive mediation: recordings reflect the recordist’s choices, and transcriptions reflect the transcriber’s analytical frameworks. These findings highlight the need for reflexive interpretation when working with hybrid materials, and confirm their importance in contemporary musical heritage where digital mediation is increasingly central.

Summary of Classification Outcomes

To support transparency and replicability, Table 2 summarises the distribution of the 120 items across the three artefact categories.

Table 2. *Classification of the 120 Musical Materials*

Artefact Category	Count	Percentage	Key Characteristics
Tangible	50	42%	Material stability, storability, and documentary value
Intangible	40	33%	Performance-based, embodied, orally transmitted
Hybrid	30	25%	Mediated forms combining material and immaterial elements

These results directly informed the typology by demonstrating that musical artefacts do not fall neatly into binary categories but instead occupy positions along a continuum shaped by materiality, performance, and mediation.

Conceptual Model

The findings support a conceptual model in which tangible, intangible, and hybrid artefacts form an interconnected system rather than discrete, isolated categories. Textually, the model can be described as a triangular schema with each artefact type occupying one vertex, as shown in Figure 1.

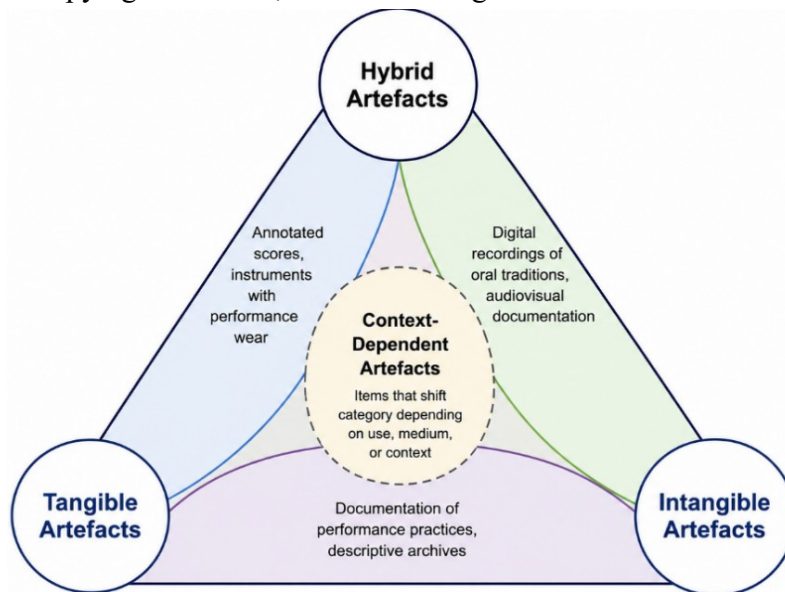


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the typology of musical artefacts showing the relationships among tangible, intangible, and hybrid forms, including their areas of overlap and context-dependent intersections.

Tangible artefacts anchor the model through their material stability and documentary value. Intangible artefacts occupy a second vertex, representing embodied, performative, and socially transmitted knowledge. Hybrid artefacts form the third vertex, mediating between the two by combining material and immaterial characteristics. The relationships among the three categories can be visualised as overlapping zones: tangible and intangible artefacts intersect where performance practices are documented through notation or archival description; tangible and hybrid artefacts intersect where physical objects incorporate performative knowledge, such as annotated scores or instrument wear patterns; intangible and hybrid artefacts intersect where oral traditions are captured through digital recording or audiovisual documentation. At the centre of the model lies a convergence zone representing musical artefacts that shift categories depending on context, use, or medium.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that musical artefactuality is best understood as a continuum rather than a binary distinction between material and immaterial forms. The results provide a coherent analytical foundation for the typology developed in this study and establish the basis for the broader theoretical implications discussed in the next section.

Typology

The typology developed in this study provides a formal, conceptually integrated framework for classifying musical materials as tangible, intangible, or hybrid artefacts. It emerges from the triangulated theoretical foundations of material culture theory, intangible cultural heritage studies, ethnomusicology, and digital humanities, and is grounded empirically in the analysis of the 120-item corpus. The typology is designed to clarify the criteria by which musical materials acquire artefactual status and to offer a coherent analytical structure for interpreting their cultural functions.

Definitions and Decision Criteria

Tangible artefacts are physical objects that embody musical knowledge through their material form. They possess stable, durable, and examinable properties that allow them to be stored, preserved, and analysed independently of performance. Tangible artefacts are identified using three criteria: (1) materiality, meaning the object exists in a physical medium; (2) storability and durability, meaning it can be preserved over time; and (3) independence from performance, meaning its cultural meaning is at least partly encoded in its physical characteristics. Examples include manuscripts, printed scores, instruments, and archival documents.

Intangible artefacts are musical forms that exist through performance, oral transmission, and embodied enactment rather than through fixed material form. They are identified using three criteria: (1) dependence on performance or enactment; (2) transmission through memory, repetition, or social participation; and (3) absence of a stable material substrate. Their cultural meaning is encoded in sonic qualities, gestural vocabularies, and contextual enactment. Examples include chants, praise poetry, improvisational practices, and orally transmitted repertoires.

Hybrid artefacts combine material and immaterial dimensions in ways that make neither aspect analytically separable. They are identified using three criteria: (1) mediation through technological or documentary processes; (2) interdependence of physical and performative elements; and (3) dual existence as both object and event. Hybrid artefacts include digital recordings, annotated scores, audiovisual documentation, and transcriptions of oral traditions. Their evidentiary value lies in the interplay between material stability and performative dynamism.

The Tangible–Hybrid–Intangible Continuum

The typology conceptualises musical artefacts not as discrete categories but as positions along a continuum shaped by materiality, performance, and mediation. This continuum can be represented textually as follows:

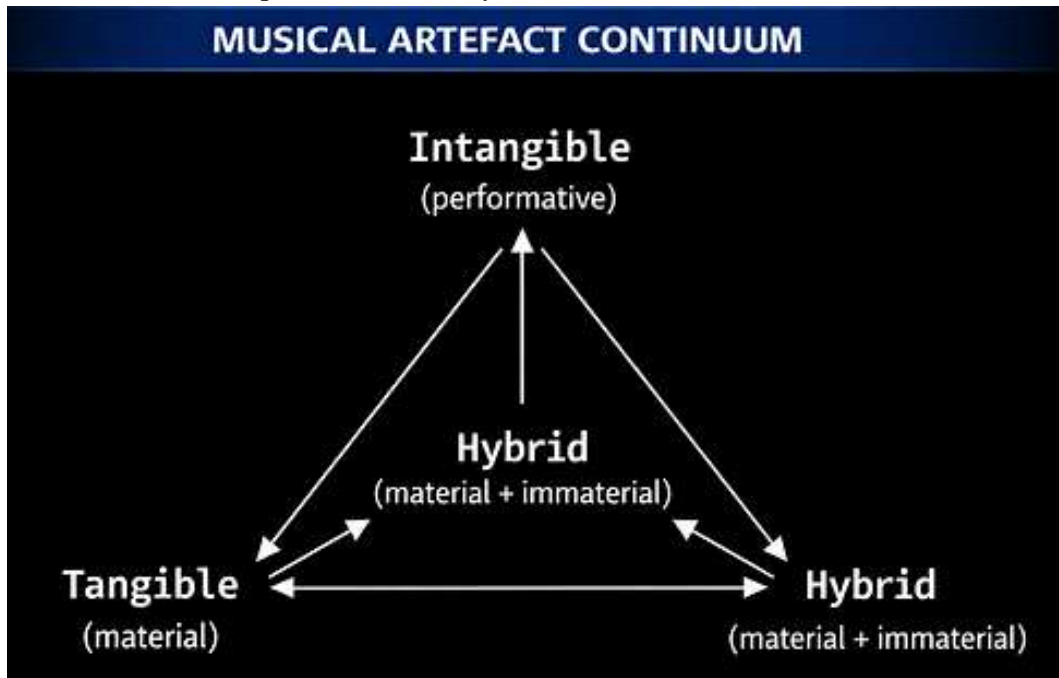


Figure 2. Musical Artefact Continuum (Triangular Model)

In Figure 2, this conceptual diagram illustrates the relational structure among tangible, hybrid, and intangible musical artefacts. Tangible artefacts occupy the material vertex, intangible artefacts the performative vertex, and hybrid artefacts the mediating centre where material and immaterial dimensions intersect. The triangular configuration represents the continuum of musical artefactuality, emphasising the dynamic interplay between physical embodiment, technological mediation, and embodied performance.

At the material end of the continuum lie artefacts whose cultural meaning is primarily encoded in physical form. At the opposite end lie artefacts whose meaning is enacted through performance and social participation. Hybrid artefacts occupy the middle ground, demonstrating that many musical materials derive their significance from the interaction between material and immaterial dimensions. This continuum accommodates the fluidity of musical practices, recognising that artefacts may shift position depending on context, use, or medium.

Novelty of the Typology

The typology is novel in four key respects. First, it extends material culture theory, which traditionally privileges physical objects, by incorporating sonic, performative, and mediated forms into the domain of artefactuality. Second, it advances intangible heritage frameworks, which recognise oral and embodied traditions but rarely conceptualise them as artefacts, by providing explicit criteria for treating intangible forms as legitimate cultural evidence. Third, it contributes to ethnomusicology's object/process debates by offering a unified framework that integrates musical objects, performances, and practices rather than treating them as competing analytical paradigms. Finally, it expands digital humanities' treatment of digital objects, which often focuses on technological mediation, by situating digital materials within a broader continuum that accounts for their dual material and performative dimensions.

Together, these contributions position the typology as the first integrated framework capable of capturing the full spectrum of musical artefacts across tangible, intangible, and hybrid domains. It provides the conceptual foundation for the analytical work presented in this study and offers a transferable model for future research in musicology, heritage studies, and cultural theory.

Discussion

The core insight of this study is that musical artefactuality operates along a continuum where tangible, intangible, and hybrid forms intersect dynamically rather than existing as discrete or hierarchical categories. This insight matters because it redefines how musical materials are conceptualised as artefacts, challenging object-centred assumptions in musicology and heritage studies, and offering a more inclusive and analytically flexible framework for understanding how musical knowledge is produced, transmitted, and preserved. By addressing the central research problem - how musical materials function as artefacts across diverse cultural contexts - the findings demonstrate that the typology developed here provides a coherent and theoretically grounded response to each research objective, revealing the cultural, epistemological, and methodological implications of reconceptualising musical materials as artefacts in their own right.

These findings address the study's research questions by demonstrating how musical materials function as artefacts across the tangible–intangible continuum, how hybrid forms mediate between them, and how this continuum provides a coherent analytical structure for interpreting musical heritage.

Empirically, the corpus revealed that tangible artefacts such as the first edition of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5* and Fela Sowande's annotated organ manuscripts function as stable repositories of musical intention and authorship. Intangible artefacts, including Yoruba *oriki* praise chants and improvisational jazz practices, embody social identity and tacit knowledge through performance and oral transmission. Hybrid artefacts, such as Smithsonian Folkways recordings of Ewe drumming, bridge these domains by combining material preservation with performative immediacy. These examples demonstrate how the typology resolves definitional ambiguity by providing clear criteria—materiality, storability, dependence on performance, and mediation—that distinguish but also connect the three categories. The continuum model thus integrates material and immaterial perspectives, showing that musical artefacts derive meaning from both physical embodiment and performative enactment.

The typology advances artefact theory by extending the concept of artefactuality beyond physical objects to include sonic, embodied, and mediated forms. It challenges narrow definitions that equate artefact with objecthood, demonstrating that intangible forms possess evidentiary power equal to manuscripts or instruments. This aligns with recent scholarship emphasising that intangible heritage is not supplementary but foundational (Bortolotto & Demgenski, 2022; Kuutma, 2021). At the same time, the typology contests material-centred approaches by showing that even tangible artefacts are embedded in interpretive and performative contexts, echoing relational perspectives in material culture studies (Hicks, 2020; Joy, 2020). In doing so, it extends Cook's (2018) argument that musical materials are best understood as relational rather than fixed entities.

For heritage policy, the typology provides a framework that supports more inclusive recognition of musical forms within cultural heritage registers. By treating intangible and hybrid artefacts as legitimate evidence, it aligns with UNESCO's (2017) principles of safeguarding living traditions while offering a practical classification system for policy implementation. The model encourages heritage institutions to move beyond object-based, cataloguing toward integrated documentation that captures both material and performative dimensions of musical culture.

In archival practice, the typology offers a methodological tool for managing the growing complexity of digital and multimedia collections. Hybrid artefacts such as annotated scores or digital recordings require analytical strategies that account for both their physical substrates and their performative contexts. This has direct implications for preservation and metadata design, responding to calls for new frameworks in digital heritage management (Giannachi, 2022; Manžuch, 2020). The

typology thus provides archivists with a structured approach for classifying and interpreting materials that do not conform to traditional object-based systems.

Within ethnomusicological analysis, the typology advances understanding of how musical artefacts embody cultural knowledge, identity, and memory. Intangible artefacts illuminate how communities encode social values and historical consciousness through sound and gesture, while hybrid artefacts reveal how technological mediation reshapes transmission and participation. This reframes musical artefacts as dynamic carriers of meaning, challenging object-centred epistemologies, and aligning with recent work on embodied repetition and communal participation in sustaining cultural knowledge (Naguib, 2021; Schiavio & Van der Schyff, 2022).

Some tensions emerged in the analysis, particularly where artefacts shifted category depending on context. A digital recording of a chant, for instance, may function as a hybrid artefact in one setting, but be treated as a tangible archival object in another. Rather than undermining the typology, these cases highlight the fluidity of musical artefactuality and underscore the importance of contextual interpretation. They suggest that artefacts cannot be understood solely through their form but must be analysed in relation to their cultural, technological, and performative environments, resonating with multimodal heritage perspectives that emphasise situational meaning (DeSilvey, 2020; Waterton & Watson, 2021).

The study's limitations relate primarily to the scope of the corpus and the conceptual nature of the analysis. While diverse, the corpus was not exhaustive, and further research could apply the typology to additional musical traditions, particularly those outside the global contexts represented here. The study also focused on interpretive analysis rather than ethnographic fieldwork, which may limit insight into community-based practices. These boundaries of interpretation point to productive avenues for future research.

Looking forward, the typology offers several implications for scholarship and practice. Researchers can apply the model to comparative studies of musical heritage, examining how different communities conceptualise and preserve their musical artefacts. Archivists and heritage practitioners can use it to design inclusive cataloguing systems that recognise intangible and hybrid materials. The model also invites interdisciplinary collaboration between musicology, anthropology, digital humanities, and heritage studies. Ultimately, the typology provides a conceptual foundation for rethinking how musical materials are understood, valued, and preserved in an increasingly mediated cultural landscape.

Conclusion

This study examined how musical materials function as artefacts across diverse cultural contexts, and addressed this problem by developing and applying a relational typology that captures the interplay of tangible, intangible, and hybrid forms. In doing so, it provided a coherent and theoretically grounded framework for analysing the multiple ways musical knowledge, identity, and memory are produced and preserved.

The study accomplished its central aim by demonstrating that musical artefactuality operates along a continuum shaped by materiality, performance, and mediation. Its contributions are threefold. Theoretically, it refined the concept of artefact by integrating material and immaterial perspectives into a single analytical model. Methodologically, it offered a structured approach capable of accommodating digital mediation, embodied practice, and archival interpretation. Empirically, it showed how the typology illuminates the evidentiary value of musical materials across cultural settings, revealing patterns obscured by narrower definitions.

The findings yield one overarching insight: musical artefacts are dynamic carriers of cultural meaning whose significance emerges from the contexts, practices, and relationships through which they circulate. This insight advances debates in music scholarship and heritage studies by challenging object-centred epistemologies, and offering a more inclusive account of how musical knowledge is sustained. It also provides practical implications for archival policy, heritage preservation, and curriculum design, underscoring the need to recognise intangible and hybrid materials alongside traditional physical collections.

Future research should extend this typology through ethnographic engagement with communities whose musical practices test the boundaries of the model, particularly in contexts where digital mediation reshapes cultural transmission. Further inquiry could explore how the typology informs the design of digital archives, the documentation of endangered musical traditions, or the development of participatory heritage initiatives. These directions arise from the study's limitations (which relate to the scope of the corpus and the conceptual nature of the analysis), and they offer productive pathways for deepening and testing the model in practice.

In closing, this study demonstrates that rethinking musical artefactuality through a relational typology provides a more accurate and culturally responsive understanding of how musical materials operate within social life. By foregrounding the interplay of tangible, intangible, and hybrid forms, it offers a conceptual foundation for future

scholarship and practice, and it affirms that musical artefacts, in all their diversity, remain vital to the preservation and interpretation of cultural heritage.

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