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Creative Data Lab

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Figure 1. Exterior, Pufendorf Institute for Advanced Studies, Lund University.

Introduction

By Carolina Jonsson Malm

Artistic research has always been rich in materials: rehearsals, sketches, recordings, notes, conversations, prototypes, unfinished drafts, and live events. Yet the systems designed to support research data management¹ – repositories, guidelines, metadata standards, and policies – have largely evolved in dialogue with scientific and technological disciplines whose materials behave very differently. As open research agendas gain momentum, the gap between what artistic research produces and what existing infrastructures can meaningfully accommodate has become more visible. The Creative Data Lab (CDL) emerged from this gap: from a sense that the field is ready for the next step, but that this step requires careful thinking, experimentation, and a shared language. The purpose of CDL was twofold: to better understand the challenges and possibilities of *artistic research data management* (ARDM), and to begin shaping approaches, concepts, and infrastructures that respect the particularities of artistic practice.

Within Europe, infrastructures for artistic research have grown in important ways: platforms such as the Research Catalogue have made it easier to publish and disseminate artistic outputs.² Yet the underlying data – the materials, processes, and iterative stages that lead to these outputs – remain far less well supported. These materials are often multimedia, multisensory, high-resolution, and sometimes deeply context dependent. They resist simple categorisation, and they do not always sit comfortably within established definitions of “research data”. Nevertheless, they are central to artistic enquiry:

1 Research data is all material created or collected during a research process, regardless of format. Research data management refers to the planning, organisation and care of research data throughout its lifecycle, from creation and active use to sharing, preservation and archiving.

2 The Research Catalogue (RC) is a non-commercial, collaboration and publishing platform for artistic research provided by the Society for Artistic Research (SAR). Society for Artistic Research (2026).

they hold method, process, and ideas; they trace how artworks come into being. Managing them is not merely an administrative task but an intellectual, creative, and ethical one. CDL sets out to explore what this might mean in practice.

Hosted as an Advanced Study Group at the Pufendorf Institute for Advanced Studies at Lund University,³ the initiative gathered a diverse group of artist-researchers, scholars, and support staff from across Lund University and Malmö University. We were joined by colleagues and invited researchers from other institutions, as well as experts from the Swedish National Data Service (SND) and the Swedish Research Council. Over the course of 2025, the group met regularly to discuss topics ranging from the conceptual (What is artistic research data?) to the practical (How do we store a multi-channel audio work without compromising quality?). These meetings combined presentations, collective readings, and speculative discussions with people developing real infrastructures, such as *Art Files*,⁴ a platform for long-term archiving and presentation of artistic research materials. The atmosphere was deliberately open and exploratory; participants were encouraged to bring their uncertainties, contradictions, and half-formed ideas. This was part of the work: ARDM is still an emerging field, and it needs space for ambiguity as well as structure.

A similar sense of openness and exploration shaped the group's engagement with the ongoing national and international debate on artistic research data. Internationally, a key point of reference was ELIA's *Towards a Manifesto for Critical Openness in Artistic Research*, a multivocal intervention that questions "the acceleration of open ideologies in digital culture and the practical implication of these developments for artistic research and its distribution", which served as an important springboard in our discussions.⁵ In a national context, SND's symposium *Art, Knowledge, Context*⁶ in October 2025 offered a valuable forum for examining these issues jointly with researchers and experts from other institutions. It was through this interplay between local enquiry and the wider debate that the themes we returned to throughout the year took shape, sometimes as practical concerns, sometimes as conceptual puzzles, and often as something in between.

3 Pufendorf Institute for Advanced Studies (2025).

4 Inter Arts Center (2026).

5 ELIA (2025).

6 Swedish National Data Service (2025).

This introductory chapter addresses some of these themes and sets the stage for further discussion. These themes were never treated as separate boxes to be ticked but emerged as intertwined questions about what artistic research data can be, how it is handled today, and how it might be cared for in the future. Rather than addressing these themes as isolated topics, this text approaches them as overlapping threads that together form a picture of a field in motion – one that is experimenting with new practices while negotiating inherited structures, technological constraints, and artistic values. What follows, then, is not a comprehensive guide but a reflection on the questions that mattered to us, as they unfolded in conversation, speculation, critique, and collaborative enquiry.

One of the starting points for our work was the seemingly simple but persistently difficult question of what artistic research data actually is. It became clear early in our discussions that any attempt to develop methods or infrastructures for artistic research data management must begin not with technical specifications but with an understanding of the materials themselves – their forms, their roles within artistic processes, and the kinds of knowledge they carry. At the same time, we were reminded that not all artistic research produces what might meaningfully be called “data” at all. For some projects, the traces of the process are abundant. For others, the work unfolds in ways that resist documentation or leave behind materials that are inseparable from the finished artistic output.

This raised a recurring difficulty in our discussions: the shifting boundary between what counts as data and what constitutes the artistic result itself. Through the year it became evident that no single, fixed definition could adequately capture this diversity. Artistic research is too heterogeneous as to its questions, its materials, and its methods to be contained within a formula. At the same time, we recognised that certain forms recur and have become characteristic of the field – audio and video documentation, photographs, annotated scores, choreographic notes, process journals, design files, workshop recordings, interactive prototypes – and that any future solution will need to support both these familiar formats and the unpredictable, experimental, and yet to be imagined forms that new artistic practices will generate. Rather than seeking a rigid definition, we came to understand artistic research data as something relational and situated: shaped by the enquiry that produces it and therefore requiring systems flexible enough to honour the known while remaining open to the uncertain and unforeseen.

Questions of *storage* became unavoidable once we began considering the material realities of artistic research data. Much of what artistic research produces is not only conceptually complex but technically demanding: multichannel audio that loses depth if compressed; high-resolution video whose colour and texture are integral to its meaning; software-based works dependent on specific runtime environments; choreographic or spatial documentation whose value lies in nuance rather than summary. Storing such materials is not a neutral act but a negotiation with formats, fidelity, and technological change, and every choice – codec, resolution, file structure, metadata, platform – affects what will remain possible for future interpretation. We often found ourselves discussing storage not as an afterthought but as an extension of artistic intent, since decisions about what can be kept shape the afterlife of a project as surely as the methods used to create it. At the same time, storage involves practical limitations: institutional systems built for text and numerical datasets rarely accommodate the size, variety, or interdependency of artistic files, and researchers must navigate mismatches between what their work requires and what available infrastructures permit.

If storage raised questions about the material conditions for preserving artistic research data, the question of sharing opened up a different set of challenges and possibilities. Within artistic research, sharing data is still relatively uncommon, not because the materials are irrelevant to others but because many projects have not historically imagined their afterlives in terms of reuse, scrutiny, or collaborative development beyond the immediate research context. Yet when we spoke about sharing, it became clear how much potential there is in making artistic research data accessible. Sharing can support dialogue within a project, allowing collaborators to revisit materials, compare interpretations, or develop ideas in parallel; but perhaps more importantly, it creates the possibility for others – researchers in different environments, later in time – to engage with the material, learn from it, build on it, or reframe it. In this sense, sharing is not simply a matter of openness for its own sake but a way of extending the life of artistic processes, allowing methods and insights to circulate beyond the singular moment in which they were produced. At the same time, the rarity of data sharing in the field reflects genuine uncertainties: how to convey context so that materials remain meaningful, how to respect the integrity of artistic work, and how to balance access with the ethical and legal considerations that follow artistic practice. These questions made it clear that sharing is not an automatic good, but when done thoughtfully, it can become a catalyst for new perspectives, unexpected connections,

and further artistic research that draws energy from the traces others have left behind. In many ways, these questions about when and how to share opened directly onto the broader landscape of open research.



Figure 2. Interior, the Pufendorf Institute for Advanced Studies.

Over the past decade, research ecosystems in Europe and beyond have moved decisively toward *open research*, accompanied by rapid digitisation of both processes and outputs. While this transition has generated powerful incentives and infrastructures for sharing publications and – progressively – research data, its implementation within artistic research has revealed both friction and opportunity. A recurring theme across the year was openness – not as a slogan, but as a practice. Open research policies emphasise *findability, accessibility, interoperability, and reusability* (the FAIR principles).⁷ Artistic research certainly benefits from this, yet it also runs up against limits where intellectual property, artistic integrity, sensitive and personal data, collaborative authorship, and the moral rights of creators complicate any simple prescription. In our conversations, questions of ethics were inseparable from questions of access and presentation: what to disclose, to whom, and under what conditions. CDL therefore approached openness as something to think with,

7 Swedish Research Council (2025).

shape, and adapt to artistic contexts: *as open as possible, as closed as necessary*. In practice, this means that openness may be full, partial, delayed, contextual, or negotiated – so that it supports artistic creation and collaboration rather than constrain them.

Against this backdrop, it became increasingly clear that questions of storage, sharing, and openness could not be separated from questions of perspective. The way materials are preserved, contextualised, or made available reflect disciplinary discipline-specific approaches and the values embedded in particular practices. If one conclusion from the year stands out, it is the value of approaching artistic research data through genuinely interdisciplinary work. The group brought together perspectives from music, musicology, visual art and comics, creative writing, literary studies, and architecture. The most productive conversations arose when these views circulated together, informed one another, and set new ideas in motion. Bringing together aesthetic sciences, artistic practice, data stewardship, and digital technology did more than pool expertise – it bridged the everyday gap between artistic and scientific research, creating a setting where problems could be reframed and solutions sketched in ways none of us would have arrived at alone. Participants consistently described this cross-field exchange as the most valuable aspect of the work, deepening our understanding of different methods, needs, and constraints, and fostering an environment that supports creativity and collaboration across disciplinary lines. In this sense, interdisciplinarity was not a backdrop but a method: a way of thinking that allowed the specificities of our respective disciplines to shape how we imagine infrastructures for artistic research data and the kinds of futures those infrastructures might sustain.

If one thing unites the contributions gathered here, it is the way different disciplines and professions refract the same questions into distinct but complementary insights. The year's conversations did not converge on a single model so much as assemble a shared vocabulary for practice. What follows reflects that variety: chapters that approach artistic research data from different angles, some through examples drawn from practice and others through broader reflections on methods, infrastructures, and conditions for artistic research. Karin Westin Tikkanen situates artistic research data within the Swedish regulatory landscape, tracing why “data” can feel alien in the arts while arguing for dialogue-driven, field-sensitive ways of making the concept workable without forcing artistic research into inherited scientific templates. Madeleine Bergquist writes from the vantage point of data stewardship, showing how policies, infrastructures, and everyday research realities meet in a

“buffer zone” of translation and mediation, where relational notions of data, and the practical ethics of openness, become central to supporting artistic researchers. Karin Johansson uses the image of artistic research as an archipelago to argue that ARDM can function as a field-building practice that supports shared knowledge formation through referencing, cross-professional collaboration, and proactive thinking. Gunnar Krantz explores the legal, practical, and artistic consequences of drawing the line between data and art, using his own practice-based research in visual communication to show how some artifacts hover in a dual state – simultaneously potential data and potential artwork. Hedvig Jalhed follows an intermodal collaboration between opera and cognitive science to demonstrate how the same datasets can support knowledge production across artistic and scientific modes at once, and how shared documentation can generate new questions, methods, and ethical reflections. Henrik Frisk examines the archive as an active and shaping force in artistic research, arguing that the meaning and future usefulness of research data depends on who documents it, in what context, and with what forms of metadata, rather than on the data alone. Lars Gustaf Andersson turns to the archive as a site of latency and discovery, suggesting how access to well-described artistic research data can enable new aesthetic scholarship – not only about finished works but about processes, thresholds, and the productive value of what remains unresolved. Our hope is that these chapters will contribute to the ongoing dialogue on artistic research data management and the various practices and challenges that come with working in and across artistic research contexts. In doing so, this conversation can help articulate shared questions, highlight workable approaches, and support the development of infrastructures that can meet the field on its own terms.

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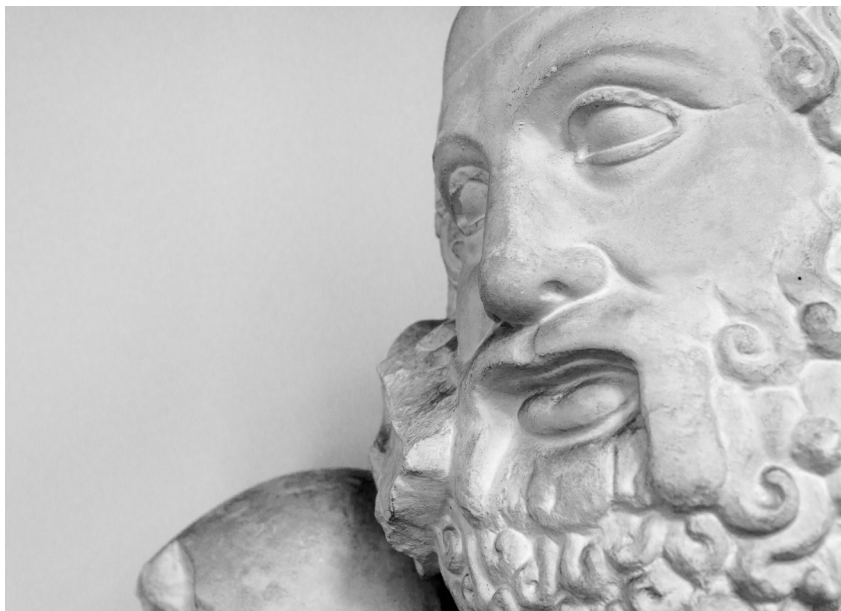


Figure 3. Interior, Pufendorf Institute for Advanced Studies, Lund University.