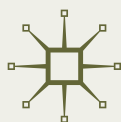


# Libraries and Archives in the Digital Age



Edited by  
**Susan L. Mizruchi**



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Editor

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ISBN 978-3-030-33372-0

ISBN 978-3-030-33373-7 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33373-7>

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*In Honor of James Anderson Winn (1947–2019), Scholar, Musician,  
Teacher, and Tireless Advocate for the Humanities*

# Acknowledgments

This book began as a forum at Boston University, “Recording Lives: Libraries and Archives in the Digital Age,” October 5–7, 2017. The forum was co-sponsored by the Boston Public Library and the Boston Athenæum and took place over three days at BU, the BPL, and the Athenæum. Most of our contributors agreed to turn their papers into full-fledged chapters, and for that I am very grateful. I am also grateful to Alan Liu for his willingness to contribute when I reached out to him. I want to thank Tamzen Flanders and Chris Loken-Kim, administrators at the BU Center for the Humanities who worked so hard on the forum logistics, which included bringing many participants from overseas. I also want to thank the BU College and Graduate School of Arts & Sciences and Office of the Provost for their generous support of the forum. Thanks to Alison Paddock whose design for our forum catalog helped to inspire our book cover. She made our “Brochure” design, not our “Catalogue”. And many thanks to my son, Sascha Bercovitch, whose work on the Bolivar Archive renewed my interest in the subject. Let me end by saying that we were all saddened by the death, on October 26, 2019, of our contributor, Rudolf G. Wagner.

# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction: Libraries and Archives in the Digital Age</b>	<b>1</b>
	<i>Susan L. Mizruchi</i>	
<b>Part I</b>	<b>Access</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Libraries, Books, and the Digital Future</b>	<b>13</b>
	<i>Robert Darnton</i>	
<b>3</b>	<b>From Open Access to Maximal Access</b>	<b>27</b>
	<i>Daniel J. Cohen</i>	
<b>4</b>	<b>A National Library in the Digital Age</b>	<b>35</b>
	<i>Alberto Manguel</i>	
<b>5</b>	<b>Discovery, Access, and Use of Information in a “Digital Ecosystem”</b>	<b>43</b>
	<i>Jack Ammerman</i>	
<b>Part II</b>	<b>Preservation and Community</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Supporting Manuscript Translation in Library and Archival Collections: Toward Decolonial Translation Methods</b>	<b>53</b>
	<i>Ellen Cushman</i>	

<b>7</b>	<b>Radical Recordkeeping: How Community Archives Are Changing How We Think About Records</b>	69
	<i>Jeannette A. Bastian</i>	
<b>8</b>	<b>Digital Archives for African Studies: Making Africa's Written Heritage Visible</b>	83
	<i>Fallou Ngom</i>	
<b>Part III</b>	<b>Archival Politics</b>	109
<b>9</b>	<b>Nambiquaras in Paris: Archival Images, Appearances, and Disappearances</b>	111
	<i>Beatriz Jaguaribe</i>	
<b>10</b>	<b>Future Memory: Preserving Diverse Voices from and About China in a Time of Unification of Thought</b>	141
	<i>Rudolf G. Wagner</i>	
<b>11</b>	<b>Cold War Archives and Democratic Aspirations in Latin America</b>	149
	<i>Kirsten Weld</i>	
<b>12</b>	<b>Globalism, Transparency, and Loss</b>	171
	<i>Maurice S. Lee</i>	
<b>Part IV</b>	<b>Digital Practice</b>	179
<b>13</b>	<b>Building from the Inside Out: Librarians as Nodes in Digital Scholarship Collaboratories</b>	181
	<i>Harriett E. Green</i>	
<b>14</b>	<b>On Librarianship and/with Digital Scholarly Practice</b>	195
	<i>Vika Zafrin</i>	
<b>15</b>	<b>Data Moves: Libraries and Data Science Workflows</b>	211
	<i>Alan Liu</i>	
<b>Index</b>		221



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# List of Figures

Fig. 2.1	The author posing with a friend at a point where students used to climb into St John's College, Oxford University, in 1961. (Source: Private photo (David Winter))	15
Fig. 2.2	Barriers that kept outsiders outside college libraries in Oxford. (Source: Private photo (Richard Ovenden))	16
Fig. 2.3	Inscription carved over the main entrance to the Boston Public Library. (Source: DPLA)	19
Fig. 2.4	DPLA's website. (Source: DPLA)	21
Fig. 2.5	An artist's rendering of ideas suggested during a public meeting about what should be included in the DPLA. (Source: DPLA)	22
Fig. 6.1	B22 F1843 Letter to Dollie Duncan on Oklahoma Penitentiary stationery IID15533005. Kilpatrick Collection of Cherokee Manuscripts. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library	61
Fig. 6.2	Interlinear translations of first four lines of letter from Walter Duncan to Dollie Duncan	62
Fig. 8.1	Excerpt from the petition of the inhabitants of Rufisque, Senegal, sent to the colonial Governor of French West Africa in 1882 with signatures in Arabic and Wolof Ajami script. (Source: Lettre des habitants de Rufisque, 6 avril 1882, Sénégal, XVI, 1a, Archives Nationales d'Outre Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France)	85
Fig. 8.2	Wooden boards used in traditional Quranic schools in Senegambia. (Picture taken in Ziguinchor, Senegal, by Fallou Ngom in January 2018)	89
Fig. 8.3	A sample bilingual Arabic-Hausa Ajami document from Mustapha Kurfi's collection illustrating dual literacies in Northern Nigeria. (Source: <a href="https://open.bu.edu/handle/2144/11722">https://open.bu.edu/handle/2144/11722</a> )	91

Fig. 8.4	Most common Wolofal (Wolof Ajami) letters used to write Wolof consonants that do not exist in Arabic. (Source: Fallou Ngom (2010, 14–15))	93
Fig. 8.5	Mixed Arabic and Mandinka Ajami manuscripts from Casamance, Senegal. According to the current owner (Abdou Karin Thiam), some of the manuscripts in this archive are over 200 years old as he is the sixth-generation heir. He inherited them from his father, Nimbaly Thiam, who died in the Mina stampede that occurred in the 2015 pilgrimage in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. (Source: Picture taken by Fallou Ngom in January 2018)	96
Fig. 8.6	Excerpt from Muusaa Ka’s popular Wolof Ajami poem called <i>Xarnu bi</i> (The Century) written in 1929 during the Great Depression	97
Fig. 9.1	The second photograph is a portrait of the guide Matias Toloiri, Expedition of 1907. Photograph by Luiz Leduc. (Source: This image is part of the collection of the Société de Géographie)	119
Fig. 9.2	Photograph by Thomaz Reis, Album of 1922. Rondon distributing gifts to the Paresis. (Source: Museu do Índio)	124
Fig. 9.3	Photograph by Tomaz Reis, Album of 1922. Rondon with Paresis at the waterfall of Utiariti. (Source: Museu do Índio)	125
Fig. 9.4	Photograph by José Louro. Olga Higgins with two of her Paresi students. (Source: <i>Índios do Brasil</i> , vol 1, p. 107. Museu do Índio)	128
Fig. 9.5	Photographs by José Louro, Album of 1922. Chief Nuchilaitê and his wife. (Source: Museu do Índio)	128
Fig. 9.6	Photographs by José Louro, Album of 1922. Portrait of Cavaignac posing as a Nambiquara and dressed in uniform. Only the photograph of Cavaignac as a Nambiquara was donated to the Société de Géographie. In the collection given to the Société de Géographie, the portrait of Cavaignac dressed in uniform is absent. There is only his image with his arrows and posing as a Nambiquara. (Source: Museu do Índio)	129
Fig. 15.1	A Wings workflow for a data analysis related to drug discovery. (From Garijo et al., “Common Motifs in Scientific Workflows: An Empirical Analysis”; © 2012 IEEE; reprinted with permission)	212
Fig. 15.2	Combinations of “moves” or “motifs” in folk narratives from Vladimir Propp, <i>Morphology of the Folktale</i> , 2d ed., translated by Laurence Scott, revised and edited with a preface by Louis A. Wagner, University of Texas Press, 1968; reprinted with permission. (Original work published in 1928)	214



# 1

## Introduction: Libraries and Archives in the Digital Age

Susan L. Mizruchi

This book originated in a 2017 forum that was organized by Boston University's Center for the Humanities and held at the *Boston Athenaeum*, at the *Boston Public Library* (BPL) and at Boston University from October 5 to 7. By invoking the term “forum,” rather than the more typical “conference,” we were thinking deliberately about creating a public space to facilitate communication among various audiences that rarely come together to share questions, ideas, and solutions. These included academic, philanthropic, and public institutions, like the *BPL* and the *Athenaeum*, which both co-sponsored our forum.

In conceptualizing forum in the broadest classical sense—as an open place for addressing issues common to the citizenry—we were not unmindful of the fact that the traditional Roman forum was confined to men of the wealthiest class, and excluded almost everyone else. Our forum was designed to be inclusive, bringing together people from a variety of institutional and professional backgrounds, with very different relationships to libraries and archives. Our contributors come from all over the world, and the subjects of their chapters are just as diverse, covering territories from the Americas—the US, South America, and indigenous America—to Africa, Asia, and Europe. The divergent life experiences, professional training, and approaches of our contributors will, we hope, result in a volume that is unique to the field.

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S. L. Mizruchi (ed.), *Libraries and Archives in the Digital Age*,

[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33373-7\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33373-7_1)

The role of archives and libraries in our digital age is one of the most pressing concerns of humanists, scholars, and citizens worldwide. Questions of what to keep and how to keep it touch the very core of who we are as individuals, cultures, nations, and humankind. Now, more than ever, the accessibility of curated historical information, the sharing of resources, and the uses of digitization raise questions central to democratic societies. This edited book brings together specialists from academia, public libraries, governmental agencies, and nonprofit archives to pursue common questions about value across the institutional boundaries that typically separate us.

The very existence of a library or archive signals a value judgment—that someone has declared a collection of materials worthy of preservation. Sometimes these declarations are made by public agencies, such as *The Library of Congress* or *The Boston Public Library*. Sometimes they are made by community groups whose collections are defined by and also help to define their political identities and purposes. Sometimes they are made by academic institutions where such judgments are dictated by the needs of scholars and by standards of professional research.

Everyone working in libraries and archives today must make decisions about how much to retain in physical form while embracing the opportunities afforded by digital methods, and such decisions inevitably raise questions about what it means to preserve things and also what significance we attribute to the things we preserve. Moreover, the matter of *how* we preserve has critical epistemological and ethical implications. Just as importantly, access to materials determines what we as scholars and citizens can know. As those who study politically embattled nations have revealed, libraries and archives hold secrets, and the recuperation of their contents can both expose the violence of authoritarian regimes and recover the memories of their victims. Regimes destroy collections as expressions of power, and their restitution can be tantamount to redressing injustices and identifying lost peoples.

While our book is focused broadly to encompass the political urgency of archival decision-making in a global context, it also attends to more local institutional considerations, particularly issues of professional status and economic compensation that arise among the staff, faculty, public servants, and administrators in various academic, governmental, and philanthropic settings. While a common commitment to libraries and archives and to innovative methods unites us, these same commitments can divide us. The frictions that arise from educational and professional as well as personal and experiential differences have to do above all with the ways in which the distinct kinds of labor performed by practitioners and scholars are valued.



Of equal concern is the goal of making the wealth of global information widely available. While pioneering organizations such as the Digital Public Library of America have succeeded in bridging institutional barriers, the next frontier is the development of new users. The pursuit of open access must be joined to the pursuit of maximal access in order for our libraries and archives to realize their ultimate aim of enlightening a world citizenry.

We hope that this book will initiate a broader global conversation among representatives of a wide range of institutions, disciplines, and professional capacities, on subjects of profound cultural and political importance. The notably diverse specialists contributing to this book represent five different continents.

The book is organized according to four major areas of analysis. **Part I, Access**, describes the innovative efforts being pursued by leading institutions and organizations to democratize access, making ever-expanding resources available on a global scale. **Part II, Preservation and Community**, explores the role of preservation methods in recuperating lost communities, strengthening existing communities, and creating new ones. **Part III, Archival Politics**, considers the practical, moral, and legal implications of destroying and restoring archives in places where the status of archives has particular political urgency. **Part IV, Digital Practice**, takes up methodological imperatives highlighting the myriad ways in which librarians and scholars can collaborate in the name of more holistic institutional understandings of digital work.

The four chapters in the first section of the book, “Access,” focus on the various problems that have arisen over time in making collections widely available. Robert Darnton’s chapter, “Libraries, Books, and the Digital Future,” describes the goals of the New Digital Public Library, invoking its chief purpose—extending access to a vast global community—as a guide to changing conceptualizations of libraries through the ages. Noting that libraries are typically considered communal, national, and even international assets, Darnton points out that their intellectual wealth has not always been viewed as shareable. In ancient Greece and China, for instance, libraries were used primarily to store precious materials and reflect dynastic power. Where library holdings were deemed subversive of governing institutions—for example, in the eighteenth-century Ching Dynasty and Stalin’s Great Terror of 1938–1939—their contents were destroyed. Elite universities contributed greatly to civilization by building up their collections but kept them behind locked doors.

During the Enlightenment, however, a counter-tendency developed, which viewed the diffusion of knowledge as a positive historical force. Articulated by

European philosophers like Condorcet and US statesmen like Thomas Jefferson, this Enlightenment ideal of open access to information depended on the printing press. Our era of digitization has given rise to a new ideal of openness. Today, Darnton asserts, we have open universities, open-source software, open metadata, and the beginnings of an open information highway. But still a darker side persists, and the final section of the chapter describes efforts by the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) to negotiate greater access with major publishing monopolies, from conglomerates such as Reed Elsevier, Wiley-Blackwell, and Springer that control 42 percent of the academic market to Google. In conclusion, Darnton points out that the DPLA is not simply a digital version of the Library of Congress, but an ever-expanding collection designed to function at personal, local, national, and international levels, and to seek out new functions over time, along with new populations to utilize them.

Daniel J. Cohen's chapter, "From Open Access to Maximal Access," notes the importance of the Open Access movement in articulating how digital media and technology, especially the web, can democratize the availability and use of primary sources that were formerly difficult to reach. Such sources were physically embedded in libraries and archives and thus mostly accessed by professional researchers with the time and ability to visit collections, rather than by the general public. The movement has had significant success in opening these collections to a wider array of readers over the last 20 years.

However, it is now clear that open access on its own is not enough. Digitized materials from libraries and archives may exist on the web in growing numbers, but these materials are largely inert, waiting for potential researchers and the public to somehow find them, rather than actively participating in the dynamism of the modern web and taking advantage of the energy and interactions of diverse communities. Thinking instead of "maximal access," and the mechanisms—both technical and social—whereby primary sources can be curated, synthesized into larger aggregate collections, and more directly engaged with audiences, is essential for the next phase of digital libraries and archives. This more ambitious goal of maximizing access has implications for scholarly and institutional practice.

Alberto Manguel's chapter, "A National Library in the Digital Age," starts with the proposition that a library exists always in potentia; it is never merely a physical construction but represents a possibility of knowledge extending beyond its own space and time. Electronic technologies have helped libraries overcome these two ancestral obstacles by offering unprecedented possibilities of access. A national library, in particular, must establish means by which all citizens become aware of these possibilities, and of the importance of reading,

both as a basic skill and as a way to stimulate and free the imagination. A national library carries a projected communal identity both for those who are, in practical terms, familiar with them and for those who are not.

The chapter raises questions such as, how is a national library to become capable of serving readers and non-readers alike; how can it convert non-readers into readers; and how can it transform the perception that most non-readers have of libraries as alien places and books—printed or digital—as alien instruments? Perhaps, he suggests, a national library can become a place where new readers are formed and old readers reaffirmed.

Jack Ammerman's chapter, "Discovery, Access, and Use of Information in the 'Digital Ecosystem,'" explores the impact of a new digital ecosystem on traditional library services and collections. For over a quarter of a century, libraries and archives have responded to changes in an increasingly digital information ecosystem while still adhering to traditional analog models for collecting and managing information. More recently, the shift from scarcity to abundance of information has resulted in the replacement of discovery and close reading by newer methods of filtering, scanning, and computational analysis. Similarly, notions of copyright and ownership have given way to emerging patterns of sharing and remixing information. Thus, the ways we think and construct knowledge evolve as new communities embrace epistemologies that challenge dominant epistemological models.

The chapters in the second section of the book, "Preservation and Community," focus on the impact of preservation and preservation methods on different communities. Ellen Cushman's chapter, "Supporting Manuscript Translation in Library and Archival Collections: Toward Decolonial Translation Methods," explores ongoing efforts to decolonize the archive, in order to build alliances between scholars, archivists, and the peoples represented in archival materials. She charts the important advances in creating protocols for working with communities to identify culturally sensitive materials and to select metadata categories for those materials.

The next step involves separating from the imperialist legacy of translation by developing decolonial translation methods and practices, which begin with an understanding of the instrumental, historical, and cultural importance of the Cherokee syllabary as an indigenous form of archiving knowledge in and on Cherokee terms. For scholars, decolonial translation methodologies help to ensure the creation of knowledge that is conversant with indigenous interpretations and representations of the past. For indigenous peoples, decolonial translation methods help to ensure that archival materials can be meaningfully integrated into ongoing language preservation efforts in indigenous communities.

Jeannette A. Bastian's chapter, "Radical Recordkeeping: How Community Archives Are Changing How We Think About Records," analyzes the functions of community archives, which have proliferated in recent years both as global and as social movements that allow diverse groups of people in a wide variety of locations—both analog and virtual—to document themselves outside of traditional archival venues. Community archives, she suggests, are markers of community-based activism. This participatory approach exemplifies the ongoing evolution of "professional" archival (and heritage) practice and is integral to the ability of people to articulate and assert their identity. Defining community archives, she describes the community archives movement, exploring it as a social phenomenon, its activist role, and its potential impact on traditional archives. She then discusses specific examples of community archives, noting by way of these examples how this radical approach to records and recordkeeping helps to capture society broadly in all of its diversity.

Fallou Ngom's chapter, "Digital Archives for African Studies: Making Africa's Written Heritage Visible," challenges the academic overemphasis on African oral traditions that began in the colonial era and has been perpetuated ever since. Creating the false impression that only oral traditions exist in sub-Saharan Africa, this scholarly misconception has obscured local forms of literacy that have endured for centuries, and also led to the complete neglect of the voluminous holdings in non-European languages contained in archives across Africa. Major collections of documents written in Arabic, *Ajami* (African languages written with enriched forms of the Arabic script), and other locally invented writing systems have existed in sub-Saharan Africa for centuries. These documents feature varied contents and forms and provide new insights into precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial Africa that will enhance the work of students and scholars in the humanities, social sciences, and professional fields. Ngom's chapter shows how digital technology helps to correct the scholarly record, by creating access to a previously overlooked African cultural heritage contained in written archives.

The chapters in the third section of the book, "Archival Politics," focus on archives that have been censored or hidden, preventing the peoples they represent from accessing their cultural history, political identities, and, in some cases, evidence of family members who were disappeared. Beatriz Jaguaribe's chapter, "Nambiquaras in Paris: Archival Images, Appearances, and Disappearances," offers a case study of a photographic archive made by the Rondon Commission and stored in the Map and Cartography Section of the National Library of France. Issuing from a 1925 gift by an anonymous donor to the Société de Géographie in Paris, these 120 images of the expeditions of

the Rondon Commission provide invaluable records of the many Indian tribes inhabiting these regions, giving rise to an exploration of the relationships among archives, historical contexts, and the politics and poetics of remembrance.

Although the feats of the military officer Candido Rondon (1865–1958) were discussed in some of the issues of the journal *La Géographie*, the images themselves have never been analyzed. In 1953, the Museum of the Indian was created in Rio de Janeiro, and when the archives of the Rondon Commission were integrated into the museum's collection, the images were digitized. Tracing the material and symbolic trajectory of these photographs, she offers a contextualized reading of their roles in different archives, historical moments, and cultural contexts. From the heady atmosphere of Paris in the 1920s with its assortments of colonial exhibits, ethnographic displays, and avant-garde appropriations of “primitive” art to a contemporary Rio de Janeiro beset by economic crisis, social conflicts, and turbulent politics, these images evoke a past of scars, legacies, and aspirations.

In his chapter, “Future Memory: Preserving Diverse Voices From and About China in a Time of Unification of Thought,” Rudolf G. Wagner describes the 30-year effort of the Heidelberg Institute of Chinese Studies to develop a hybrid Chinese Studies library of books, films, TV recordings, music scores and recorded performances, and digital resources (subscribed and locally curated). Launched in 2001, The Digital Archive of Chinese Studies (DACHS) is part of this effort. Designed to counter government censorship, and the consequent loss of Chinese public discussions as well as academic work in Chinese Studies journals, the goal of DACHS is to preserve the conflicts and tensions in the national discourse by downloading political controversies and archiving voices silenced by Chinese officialdom. By documenting the widest possible range of voices in the public sphere, from the Chinese government to social groups, public intellectuals, and individuals who have been directly at odds with it, DACHS (and the library as a whole) seeks to make this cacophony of perspectives available to professional humanities and social science research.

In “Cold War Archives and Democratic Aspirations in Latin America,” Kirsten Weld explores efforts to secure citizen access to the archives of formerly repressive Cold War regimes in Latin America. The opening of such state records, especially the records of security and intelligence services, has come to be considered essential to processes of transitional justice in postwar and post-dictatorship societies like Guatemala, El Salvador, Argentina, and Chile, and civil society movements have fought ardently for their release. Yet the greatest social value of such records may extend beyond their potential

evidentiary use in court, to their role in what some analysts have called an “ecological approach to social repair.” Along the way of her analysis, she asks about the benefits and costs of applying a narrowly juridical logic to the opening of such files; whether there might be other uses to which such files might fruitfully be put, and how the framework of “human rights archives” enables grappling with these issues. Her ultimate concern is to assess how the opening of Cold War state security archives relates to the work of concretizing democratic aspirations in Latin America.

Maurice S. Lee’s chapter, “Globalism, Transparency, and Loss,” reflects on the complex and contradictory aspirations of our “digital age,” which cleaves on the one hand to the promise of total information, while acknowledging on the other the historical and cultural contexts in which such promises are foiled. National barriers, epistemological limits, the opacity of physical bodies do not simply undermine dreams of total information, but prompt a more modest, more necessary set of claims that digital archives can pursue. The possibilities of reclaiming information, whether in the service of political justice or scientific objectivity, remain haunted by the specter of loss, even as facts and knowledge are gained. Assuming a classically skeptical stance, the chapter traces the power and limits of digital archives in our increasingly disenchanted information age.

The chapters in the fourth and final section of the book, “Digital Practice,” examine the prospects and limits of this moment from the perspective of library and information professionals and the research collaborations they seek in their effort to retool scholars in the humanities and social sciences. In her chapter, “Building from the Inside Out: Librarians as Nodes in Digital Scholarship Collaboratories,” Harriett E. Green offers an overview of the challenges and possibilities for librarians to partner with humanities and social science scholars in data-driven research. She then explores the recent training initiatives she and others have led that seek to expand the scope of librarians’ research capacities. She proposes strategies that involve recalibrating methods to meet the data-driven needs of users, as well as reframing the role of librarians in the research lifecycle today. Such changes, she concludes, should lead to new understandings of the scholarly end product of research as well as greater appreciation for the interdependence of different knowledge producers.

In her chapter, “On Librarianship and/with Digital Scholarly Practice,” Vika Zafrin explores the role of library professionals as information management specialists in a politically fraught information age. Taking an institutional perspective, she notes how assessments of the intellectual contributions of library professionals can be distorted by dated ideas about what librarians do, and by institutionalized inequity between faculty and staff. Widely

acknowledged by the fields involved, and largely unacknowledged by institutional structures, is the fact that librarians are engaged in digital scholarly work that generates new knowledge. In order to truly innovate, she asserts, librarians must be given the space and time for their work to evolve. Invoking the example of Boston University's Digital Scholarship Services' contributions to the African Ajami Library (discussed above in Fallou Ngom's chapter), she highlights the economic, relational, and labor issues that arise with the institutionalization of digital scholarship. Addressing the internal political dimensions of translating knowledge among digital project participants with different fields of expertise, she assesses what libraries can offer in the current global political context. Her ultimate purpose is to challenge the image of library professionals as service providers; they are instead intellectual collaborators whose unique ability to mediate varieties of knowledge should be recognized as central to the university's research mission.

In his chapter, "Data Moves: Libraries and Data Science Workflows," Alan Liu seeks to bridge disciplinary approaches to data, by identifying common goals and stressing the value of certain methods across disciplinary enterprises. Thus, for example, the precedent set by *in silico* science models, which have annotated and visualized data-analysis workflows for reproducibility and compared data workflows in different fields, would be applicable to data analysis in the humanities and social sciences. Citing shared goals of making data scholarship open and reproducible, and enabling a meta-level analysis of such scholarship, he suggests that the digital humanities, digital arts, and digital social sciences would derive great benefit from borrowing such scientific data paradigms. Such borrowings, Liu argues, work both ways, for the sciences also have something to learn from the storytelling methods of the humanities. In particular, a twentieth-century tradition of literary and ethnographic analysis, the idea of the narrative "motif" or "move," might prove valuable to scientific analysis of data workflows. For no matter how one is analyzing data, it is always necessary to *tell the story* of that workflow and its results.

# Part I

Access