

## *Editors' Introduction*

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When starting a new academic journal, the editors should explain themselves (and perhaps apologize) to the targeted audience, who might perhaps be convinced that there are currently more than enough journals. So, please, allow us to explain.

Now is the time for a journal that focuses on critical engagement with digital librarianship. Increasingly, digital library professionals, scholars, and others are asking questions such as: Who gets to choose what items, from the broad sea of options available, will be digitized and uploaded to digital libraries? Who gets to describe these materials, and should descriptions that were created decades or centuries ago be revisited and amended? What are the consequences, in terms of privacy, respect, or empathy, that archival material is easier to access, use, and reuse once it's in the digital library? How do we integrate antiracism, feminism, and queer theory into our digital library work and collections?

Our profession is changing rapidly. The collections as data projects, running since 2016 in various instantiations, has helped bring into focus the cultural heritage community's growing interest in offering digital library content as data to be used and reused independently of library-built interfaces. And among all the technological questions and considerations, among all the talk of APIs, AI, and ontologies, collections as data projects have always foregrounded ethical and critical approaches to the work. For example, "The Santa Barbara Statement on Collections as Data," defines a commitment to "work against historic and contemporary inequalities represented in collection scope, description, access, and use."<sup>1</sup> Relatedly, Tonia Sutherland's IMLS-funded project, "Premised on Care: Redescription as Restorative Justice in American Archives," aims to gather and promote emerging practices of critical redescriptive work in digital collections.<sup>2</sup> Enabling the success of these two examples are dozens of institutionally-specific initiatives that center ethics and equity.

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<sup>1</sup> Always Already Computational - Collections as Data, "The Santa Barbara Statement on Collections as Data," accessed October 19, 2021, <https://collectionsasdata.github.io/statement/>.

<sup>2</sup> See Sutherland's Interview with Sophia Ziegler in this issue for a deeper exploration of this project.

Despite the growing interest in critical approaches to digital librarianship, there remains no obvious place to publish investigations into these questions. Many of us have been taking advantage of journals such as *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, *American Archivist*, *Code4Lib Journal*, *Journal of Critical Library and Information Science*, *Archives Journal* and others that approximately fit our needs. While these remain important outlets for many related concerns, we hope that the *Journal of Critical Digital Librarianship* offers a uniquely situated space in which questions of digital librarianship can be asked among a like-minded community of practitioners, scholars, and professionals.

This first issue is both a look at where we've been, and a roadmap for our future. For this inaugural issue, we invited papers from the Louisiana Digital Library's #LDLasData Speaker Series participants. Held over the course of five months, the speaker series brought together digital library practitioners and scholars to investigate topics such as the critical pedagogical affordances of digital libraries, redescription as reparative justice, the role of digitization in uplifting historically marginalized communities, and the application of an ethics of care to the building of digital collections. The full speaker series, totalling eight recorded sessions in all, is available online.<sup>3</sup> This issue includes three invited papers from this series, as well as one interview based on a presentation.

Our issue begins with Sophia Ziegler's interview with Tonia Sutherland, "It Matters Who Does This Work." Sutherland's work focuses on the importance of redescrbing digital objects in a way that prioritizes care and restorative justice. In the interview she discusses the role of positionality for LIS professionals, and presents an optimistic perspective on the future of digital librarianship.

In "Centering the Margins in Digital Project Planning," Dorothy Berry suggests specific methods for doing work that resists the oppressively white trajectory of LIS and archives, specifically work that builds programmatic and equitable digital collections. She draws on her experience at Harvard's Houghton Library in order to propose workflows that center materials and stories that have been historically pushed to the margins. Moving beyond patron requests and usage statistics, she invites us to consider the role of digitization selection in maintaining--and potentially resisting--white supremacy.

Jacqueline Wernimont's paper, "Listening, Care, and Collections as Data" uses the *Eugenic Rubicon* project to explore an ethics of care approach to digital projects. She proposes that sharing sensitive data through non-visual modalities can center experiential understanding over extractive information sharing. In the case of *Eugenic*

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<sup>3</sup> "LDL Speaker Series," Louisiana Digital Library, video playlist, [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLCxbFeOW17cPkkJ0MbnN2uA2QILT\\_TPA0](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLCxbFeOW17cPkkJ0MbnN2uA2QILT_TPA0).

*Rubicon*, sonification (the translation of data into sound) allows users to *listen toward* those who survived reproductive violation while making clear our partial and mediated access to their stories. This article highlights ways in which feminist care ethics intersect with collections as data frameworks as well as theories of archival care, and how it emphasizes the responsibility of digital library professionals to be answerable to communities with which we engage, particularly within asymmetries of power.

Asymmetries of power also exist in the dynamic between educator and student. In “Using Digital Libraries to Engage the Whole Student: Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies, Trauma-Informed Classrooms, and Project-Based Learning,” Alejandra Torres provides lesson plan ideas that encourage students to engage with digital collections in ways that deepen their understanding of how their identities are affirmed or marginalized on a daily basis. Students enter learning spaces with their own cultural knowledge, personal interests, and, often, need for healing. Torres demonstrates ways in which educational experiences that are culturally-sustaining, trauma-informed, and project-based can guide students to consider strategies for transforming systemic injustices and promoting personal and community restoration. Digital libraries, Torres highlights, can be an avenue for students to amplify their curiosity and explore their own identities.

This inaugural issue also outlines possible futures for the journal. We recognize that there are many people doing work in critical digital librarianship who are not likely to contribute to an academic journal, such as software developers and practitioners whose job descriptions do not include research and writing time. Accordingly, we plan to pursue interviews as a means of including as many voices as possible. And while submissions are welcome and encouraged, we also foresee invited papers as an important means of including current developments. By supporting the transformation of conference presentations into papers, we hope to uplift new voices and perspectives.

However, there is much we do not know about the future of the *Journal of Critical Digital Librarianship*. We hope it will facilitate even more critical investigation into the practice of digital librarianship. To this end we have chosen to be open peer review, explicitly introducing authors to reviewers and working to foster a sense of shared goals and community. We have crafted a code of conduct that we hope establishes a space of mutual respect and shared responsibility. But the future of the journal is no more settled than the future of digital librarianship itself. We hope to look back, from a perspective not yet possible, and know that we, together, all of us, made some meaningful contribution. The future is a large and messy place; beautiful in its uncertainty and possibility. It is our hope that we all have a say in what the future of digital librarianship can be. We invite you to join us.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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