

The Life and Death of Data

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This interactive essay is available at the companion website: <https://digitalsts.net>.

Arnold Arboretum Plant Accessions (Living and Dead) from 1872-2012

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Credits:
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00. About

In collections of scientific and cultural history that are too big to see, data act as virtual handles for rare and delicate artifacts from the past. At the Arnold Arboretum, a long-lived collection of trees, vines and shrubs managed by Harvard University, landscapes from around the world and across time are stitched together by data. However, data are worthy of study themselves. Created in varied social and technological eras, they register the organizational structures and values of their time. Through a combination of data visualization and interviews with Arboretum staff, this data documentary illuminates what data can teach us about their own social and material histories, as well as how to study institutions of collecting digitally.



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Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec

A screenshot from the interactive essay, *The Life and Death of Data*, about the accession records of Harvard University's Arnold Arboretum, accessible online. Image by Yanni Loukissas and Krystelle Denis.