The Resonance of Dante's Works in the 20th and 21st Century
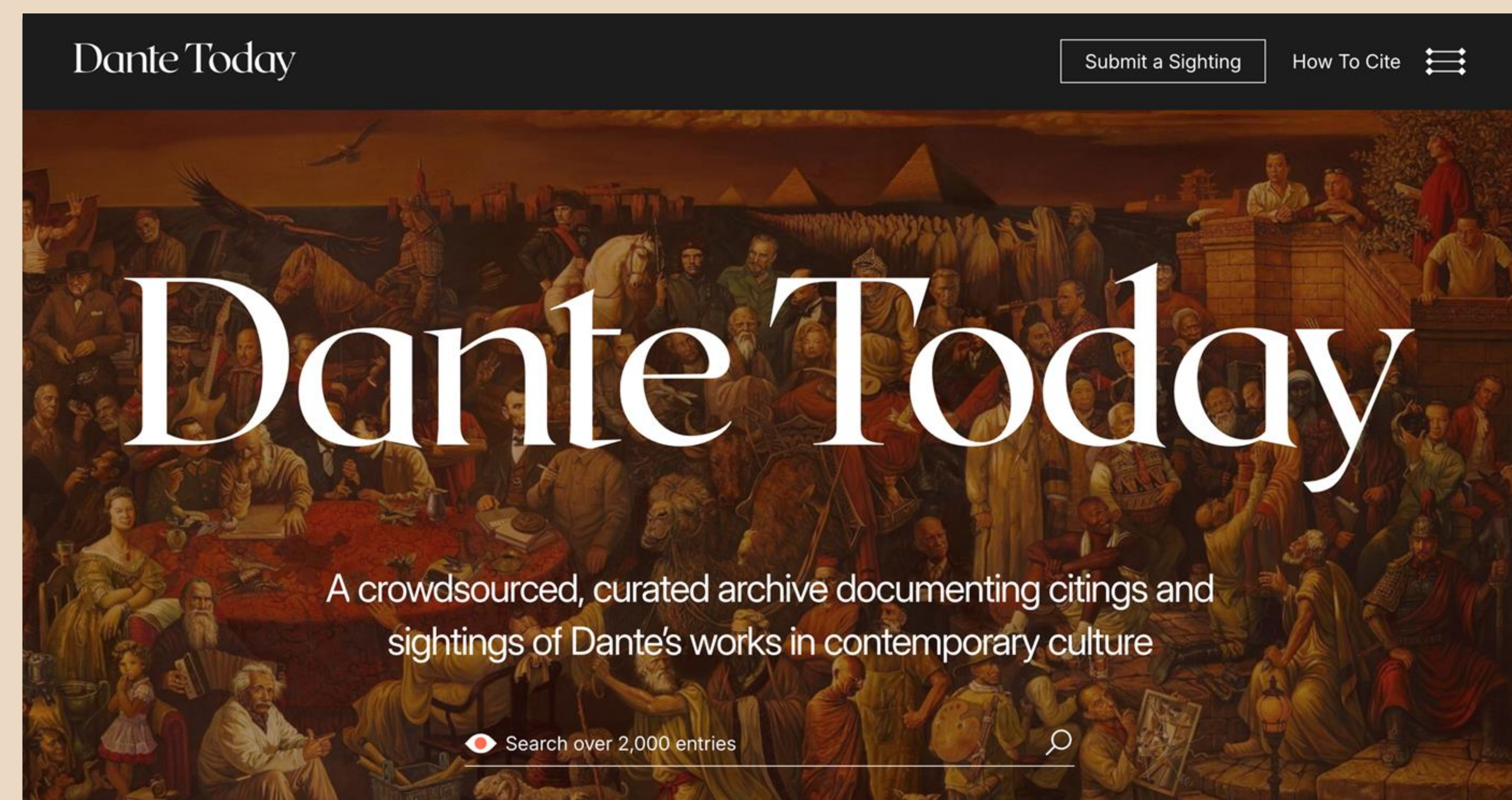
Helena Helmke and Dr. Elizabeth Coggeshall,

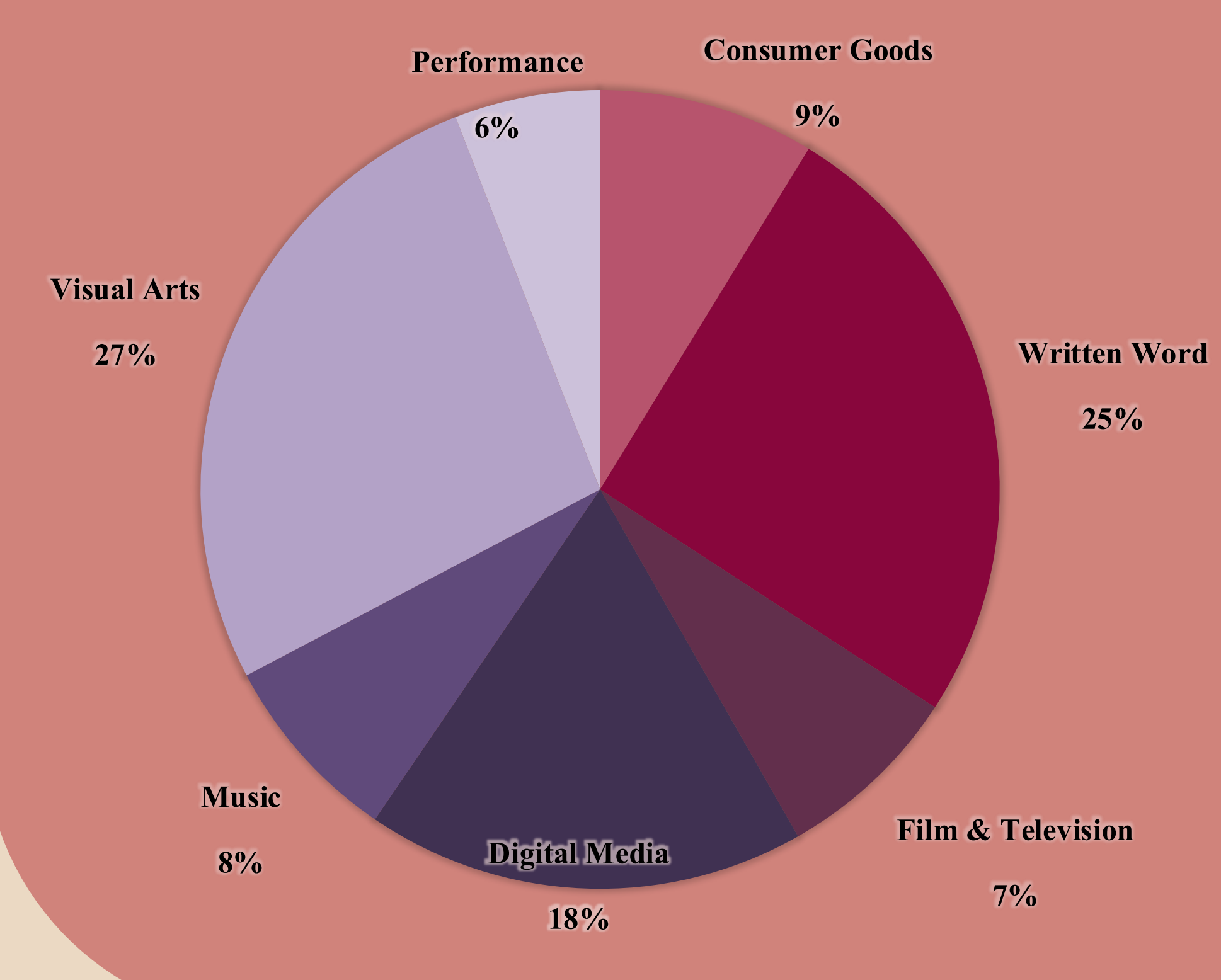Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics.

Introduction

Dante Alighieri, a medieval Italian poet, is the author of the epic poem *The Divine Comedy,* which is widely considered one of the greatest works of literature in history. The digital archive, *Dante Today*, collects diverse references to Dante Alighieri's works: everything from surface-level mentions of his name to thematic references to concepts present in his works, to even specific quotes from his poetry. The references are recategorized into different media forms, including consumer goods, digital media, film & television, music, performance, visual arts, and written word. The project has been working on transferring all the data collected to a new version of the website that is now online. The new website offers a more user-friendly platform where readers can search by key terms, narrowing down to topics, sub-topics, and related terms. Our research project has been focused on creating a comprehensive database that compiles references to Dante's works in one accessible location, serving as a valuable resource for teaching and research. The *Dante Today* digital archive exists to explore how Dante's works have resonated across cultures and how they are received in various mediums.

A crowdsourced, curated archive documenting citings and sightings of Dante's works in contemporary culture

Map of Dante Sightings

Dante in the Philippines – 700

"A Facebook page dedicated to Dante-related events in the Philippines, updated by the Philippine Italian Association."

Methods

The subject studied is the resonance of the poet Dante Alighieri's works. The project *Dante Today* is a database where anyone can upload references to Dante's works or himself. The site's creators then review the submission to determine if the uploads are direct references to Dante.

- The site analyzes and categorizes the references into topics such as consumer goods, digital media, film & television, music, performance, visual arts, and the written word.
- The site was in a redesign phase, so the work we conducted was transferring old posts from the old site to the new one by copying the old posts to an upload and re-tagging the posts.
- The tagging of the posts consists of selecting topics that align with the post's content, ranging from "In the Comedy," with all the Cantos of *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* represented.
  - Other tags include the medium of consumer goods, digital media, film and television, music, keywords, and location.
  - The location tag is significant because the site provides a map of all the references.
- By tagging the posts, we create a filter system to make the website more navigable for users.
  - For example, users can now search for the character Virgil in comics.
  - When copying the old post to the new website, it is important to examine the posts closely to confirm I am tagging all the topics referenced.
- While uploading the old posts to the new site, often there will be missing pictures, authors, or hyperlinks of the original content, thus requiring us to do further research to recover the missing portions.

***The Washington Post* Daily Crossword, February 20, 2025**

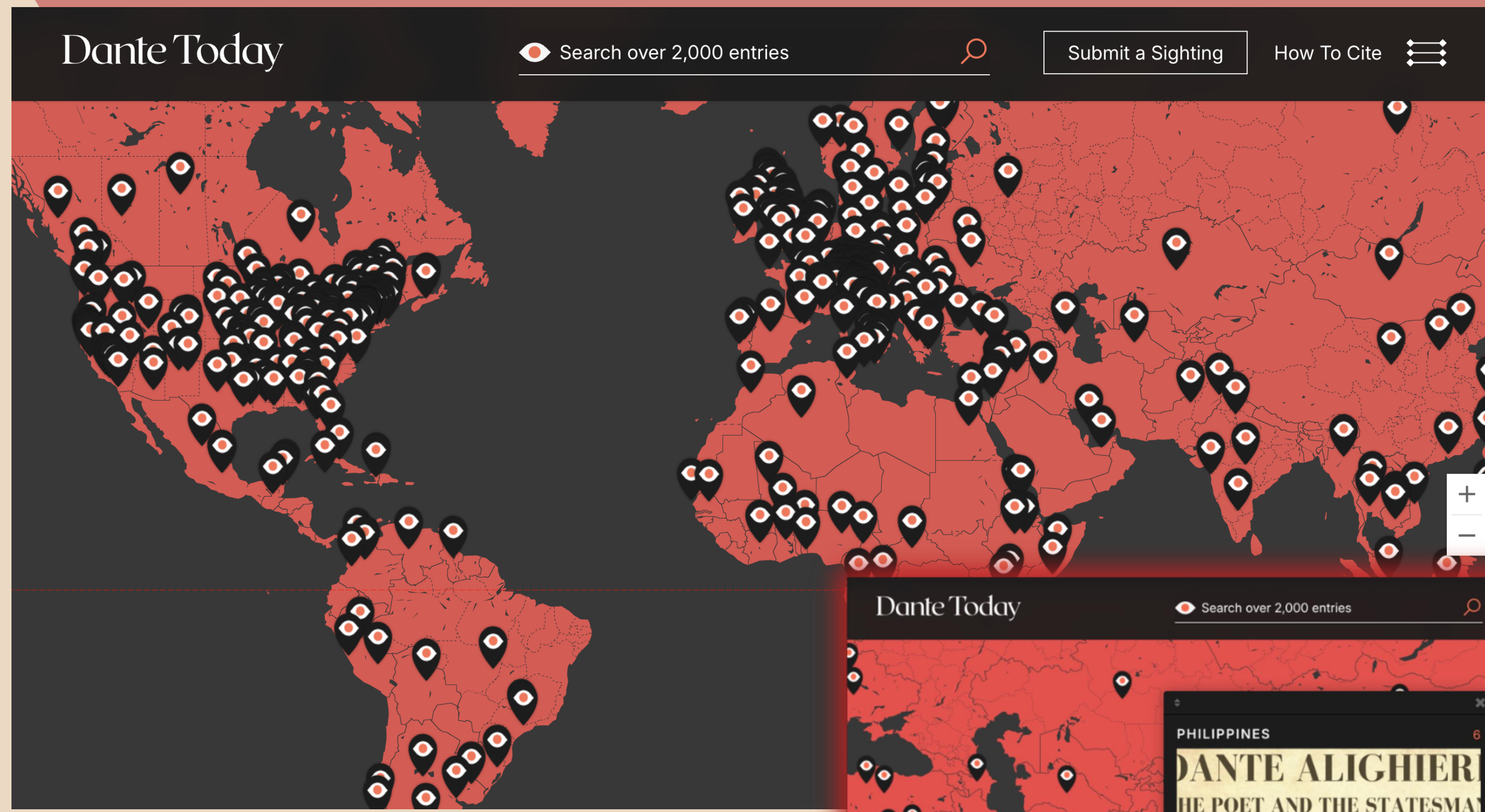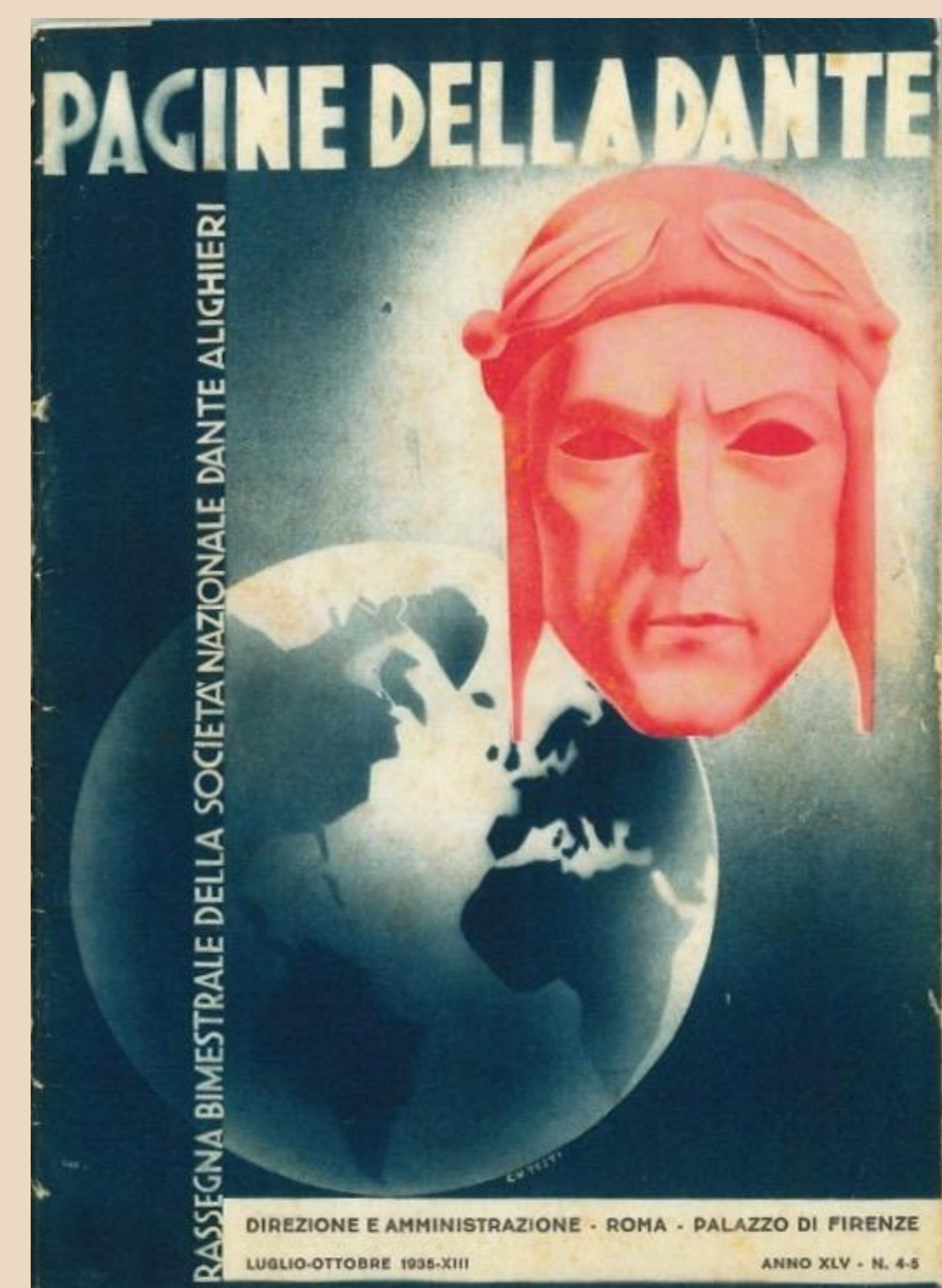
Società Nazionale Dante Alighieri

The Archive's Data

- The archive has collected over 2,000 entries.
- The site features a map that pinpoints the locations of where all the sightings were found.
  - Each pin allows the user to click on the icon to discover what artifacts or Dante references were found.
- The graph below depicts percents of how many sightings are posted in each category.

Performance 6%
Consumer Goods 9%
Written Word 25%
Visual Arts 27%
Film & Television 7%
Digital Media 18%
Music 8%

Ritratto di Dante Alighieri

An oil on canvas portrait of Dante painted by Sandro Botticelli in 1495.

Further Research

Dante and Fascism

- During my research on the *Dante Today* project, transferring old posts to the new website, I came across references that led me to question the extent of the influences of Dante's *Divine Comedy* on Italian fascist ideology.
- In the preliminary research I discovered that the fascists appropriated Dante's symbolic image of Italian culture to gain support for the party.
  - During his reign, Mussolini mandated the reading of the *Divine Comedy* in school.
  - Mussolini had a proposed memorial called Danteum, depicting the *Divine Comedy* but, it was never built.
  - The *Società Nazionale Dante Alighieri* was a fascist-supporting Italian culture magazine.
- I expect to find a substantial amount of Italian fascist speeches and literature directly referencing portions of the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*.

My Dante Sightings

- In working on this project, I have come across several Dante references in my daily life, one being from *The Washington Post* Daily Crossword.
- I came across a YouTube video of a gamer making a roller coaster inspired by Dante's nine circles of *Inferno*.
- I discovered a possible Dante reference in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* when Harry is saved by the centaur, Firenze, in the Forbidden Forest.
  - Firenze meaning Florence in Italian which was Dante's home.

Danteum Memorial

Watercolor of the Purgatory room

Resources and Further Reading