Dante Today: An Archive of Sightings of Dante in Contemporary Culture

Gabriela Lopez-de Cespedes, Dr. Coggeshall
Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics

FSU | FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

FSU UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM
CENTER FOR UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH & ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

Abstract

In 2006, upon teaching her "Dante's Divine Comedy" course, Arielle Saiber (Johns Hopkins University, formerly Bowdoin College) found that the students repeatedly approached her with a curious array of findings. The students had found numerous references to Dante and his works, which inspired Arielle Saiber to create the site. The site was created as a way of digitally archiving these sightings of Dante's works, but its purpose evolved to include further goals. As stated on Dante Today, the goal of creating such an expansive digital archive is not only to record Dante's presence in contemporary culture, but to provide this data to others. The project reached Florida State University through Elizabeth Coggeshall (Florida State University, formerly Stanford University). Elizabeth Coggeshall is the co-editor of the website, and her studies specialize in Italian literature and culture, including the Italian writer and poet Dante. She began collaborating with Arielle Saiber as co-editors of Dante Today in 2012. Over this time, Dante Today has become brilliantly saturated with over 2,000 sightings collected. Sightings are sorted according to an expansive tagging system, as well as according to their location, language and other key identifiers. Dante Today acts as a multimedia archive of the way in which Dante's writing has evolved to encompass different modern and historical narratives, indicating the way in which Dante's works have been adapted by the world. This website is continuously being updated and can be explored by both seasoned scholars of Dante and students who are first learning of Dante.

Methods:

One significant aspect of Dante Today is the tagging system—particularly the geographical aspect of it. When a sighting is submitted, not only is its accompanying information documented in the system, but there is also the option to provide details regarding its location of origin. This is immensely useful data for contributions such as graffiti, street art and other anonymous installations because it adds character and context to the sighting. A specific tab of the website is dedicated to the data found from all geologically tagged sightings. When navigating to the "map" on Dante Today, viewers can see a map with various miniature pins scattered across the world. This visually represents the depth of Dante's influence and creates an interface that may be easily navigated. Rather than sifting through the archive's countless entries, sightings are made readily available through the pins on the map. Each pin is linked to a particular sighting found in that exact place. This is something that makes Dante Today unique, as it is modernizing the archiving of information relating to Dante. Additionally, the places in which the map has become progressively more populated with pins demonstrates a greater number of sightings.

Website Homepage and Live Map:
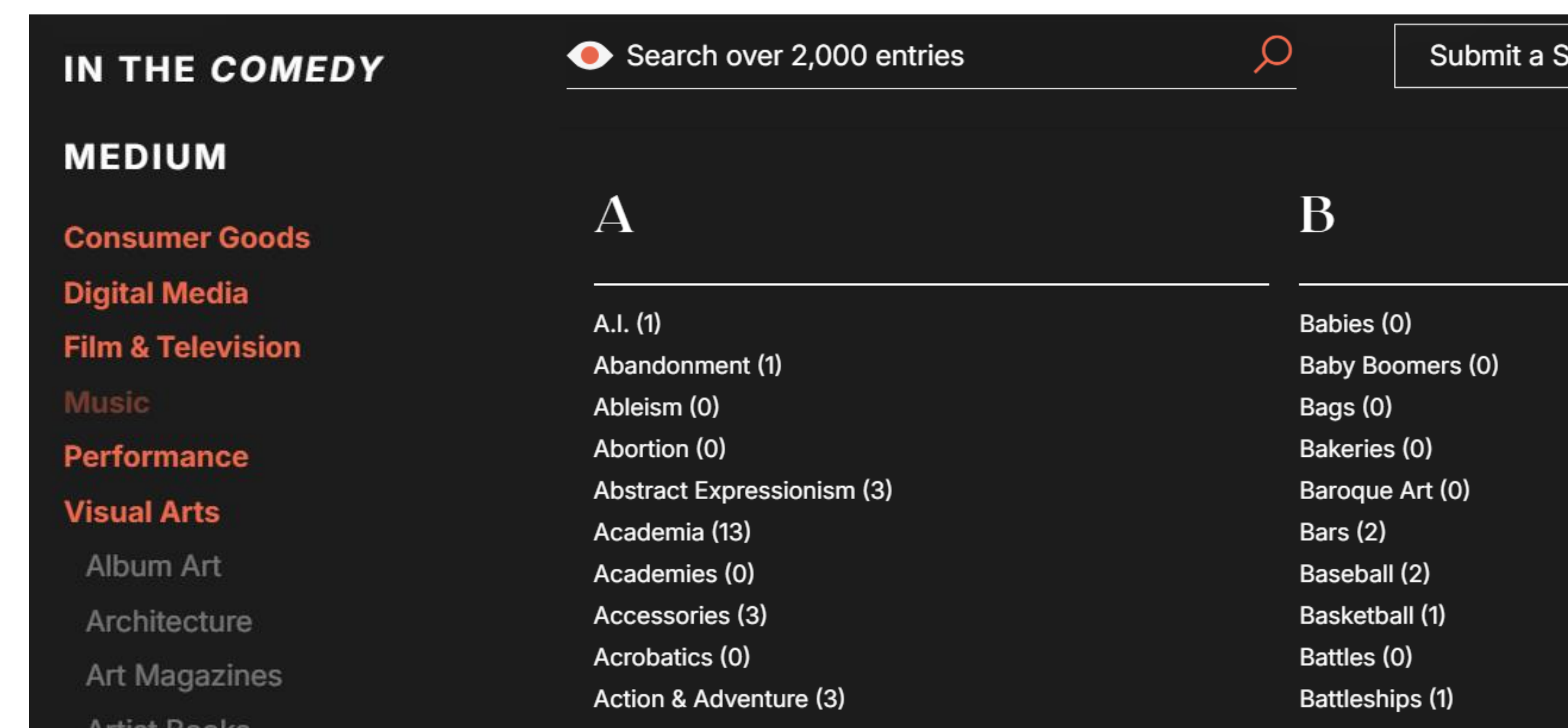
Results and Limitations:

During my time as a UROP student I primarily worked on the transfer of sightings from the old website to the new. This entailed sorting through several pages of posts under one category (i.e. Written Word, Arts & Architecture, etc…). The works are then individually cross-checked with the new website's database to ensure there are no duplicates. Each work that has already been submitted is then subjected to editing if there is missing information or errors. Some posts that are on the old website required more lengthy dedication to transferring them to the new website due to their image links breaking or becoming lost altogether. After transferring all the existing information, I added relevant tags to each post before submitting. Overall, the new website's completion allows the database to be regularly updated and navigated much more quickly than the prior website. The new website will now feature an updated geographical map of Dante sightings as well as a precise filtering system that was not at all previously available. This filtering system is crucial to the database, as without it navigating the website would be cumbersome and time consuming when looking for a specific sighting.

While constructing the tagging system of the website, various challenges arose. The tagging system requires that a post falls under a specific category, which led to the creation of a plethora of niche tags. These more specific tags would then be organized under broader categories of the website, such as "Written Word" or "Politics." This greatly helped expedite the sorting of each sighting. However, the map functions as a sort of extension of the tagging system, each post must be tagged with its geolocation in order to have it appear as a pin on the map. We encountered technical difficulties with sightings that were tagged under multiple different places, such as "United States" and "Canada" being attributed to the same post. In order to streamline the system, the editing team realized we needed to only tag each sighting with one location that is relevant. This also allowed for sightings to be found in a more accurate and simple manner by those browsing the website.

References:

Coggeshall, Elizabeth and Arielle Saiber, eds. *Dante Today: Citings and Sightings of Dante's Works in Contemporary Culture.* Accessed February 23, 2025.

Dai Dudu, Li Tiezi, and Zhang Anjun, *Discussing the Divine Comedy with Dant*e (2006).