

[DH Internationally: Dispatches from Hamburg](#)

Posted on [August 17, 2012](#) by [jenguiliano](#)

Digital Humanists from across the globe gathered last week at our annual conference, [DH2012](#), hosted in the lovely city of Hamburg, Germany. While the weather felt tremendously cold to those of us who've spent the last few weeks in the US with 100 plus degree temps, the conference itself could not have had a warmer reception. From keynotes that explored the intersections of cultural studies, internationality, and digitality to the variety of conference presentations and events, DH2012 lived up to its efforts to capture digital culture and the current state of the field. And Hamburg itself was welcoming to a large number of us who spoke no German beyond simple phrases.

Continuing our efforts to capture trends, innovative research agendas, and just plain DH fun for those who can't always attend every event they want, here are a few quick thoughts on the conference.

From an U.S. centered-perspective, the week was a celebration of the funding efforts of the [Office of Digital Humanities](#) and the tremendous work they have done to increase the disciplinary, methodological, and humanistic questions being funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. From the work of the Alliance for Networking Visual Culture's [Scalar](#) (still in beta) to Scholar's Labs recently released [Neatline](#) through our own [Topic Modeling Workshop](#), the ODH proved that even small amount of federal funding can have transformative powers in Humanities research. I only wish that NEH administrators and our Congress could have been in the room for these presentations: the question of the value of the NEH and the impact of ODH more specifically was soundly recognized by the international audience and proved that there is a value in humanities within the globally-engaged world.

More internationally-speaking, the conference was a continuing salvo in the rapid spread of digital humanities, both to individuals but also to entirely new professional and institutional organizations. The Japanese Digital Humanities Organization joined the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations, our national umbrella organization (with our own Neil Fraistat as its incoming Chair of the Steering Committee), while the Germans celebrated the solidification of their own national organization.

For all of these trumpets and well-deserved fanfare, DH2012 continued its existing efforts to grapple with diversity. While the gender balance visually appears to be improving, the event itself continues to struggle with garnering the attention and attendance of digital humanists in Latin America, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Africa (to name just a few). The Mexican Network of Digital Humanists ([Red de Humanistas Digitales, RedHD](#)) held the [First Meeting \(or Conference\) of Digital Humanists](#) at the [Vasconcelos Library](#), Mexico City earlier this year and presented a bit on their efforts but, by and large, the conference was dominated by attendees from the U.S., Canada, and Western Europe. There are digital humanities efforts in other nations. How can we do better to support their attendance at our international event?

Related to, but divergent from, the issue of national diversity is the issue of diversity in Digital Humanities more generally. Brought to attention in a number of presentations but especially that of Amy Earhart (see the [video](#)), I was troubled by the definition of what constituted/constitutes diversity and where those methodologies, pedagogies, and theories seemed to have disappeared to. With clear exception of Earhart and a handful of others, it seemed diversity beyond nationality was a gesture in name only (read: I've included women within my data, or women are part of the project, or this project concerns nationality X). There was extraordinarily little attention to diversity as construction, where race, class, ability, sexuality, and on modify, constrain, construct, and influence the data, methodology, pedagogy, theory, and research practices within digital humanities. I am reminded of a friend who, in a discussion of methodological developments in my own dissertation work on early 20th century white middle-class male production of Native American masculinity through halftime mascotry/performance, once remarked to me about a thesis I'd written: "all of the work you've done is great, but you've missed the obvious point: until you address the white, the middle-class, the male, the production, the masculinity, the identity politics, AND the performance aspects that exclude others from those categories and sources/data, you haven't done a responsible analysis." Put more simply, a responsible humanistic analysis recognizes divergent data, theory, methodology, pedagogy and

practice. As a historian, I'm not permitted to gesture at subaltern theorists, outlying sources, or isolationist research practice just because I am focused on achieving a methodological goal. I must instead confront, rectify, and engage with these things or else leave myself open to critique. Just because we discuss the technical methodologies more blantly and frequently within our gathering and focus on our products, does not mean we should discard our obligations as humanists: to produce sound scholarly inquiries that answer humanities questions.

I don't mean to suggest that there are not shining examples of projects, individuals, and institutions that are confronting these issues...but until exchange between digital humanists addresses not just the digital methodological questions but also the humanistic methodological questions, I fear we will continue to suffer from stymied efforts to address diversity in meaningful ways. I find myself wanting to shout: Where my Cultural Theorists At?

I lay no blame for this on the program committee, nor the professional organization as a whole, but instead suggest that it is our obligation as individual scholars to recruit the attendance and presentation of promising scholars from fields that offer potential to transform digital humanities. In my conference-addled brain, I hope for a digital humanities future where we see the emergence of scholars who can easily merge method, theory, and practice in meaningful ways that truly interrogate our assumptions, dependencies, and conclusions.

[originally posted: July 24th at <http://mith.umd.edu/dh-internationally-dispatches-from-hamburg/%5D>