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A SHARP turn and a sunburn

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POSTED BY JOHN BARANIK IN SUMMER 2013

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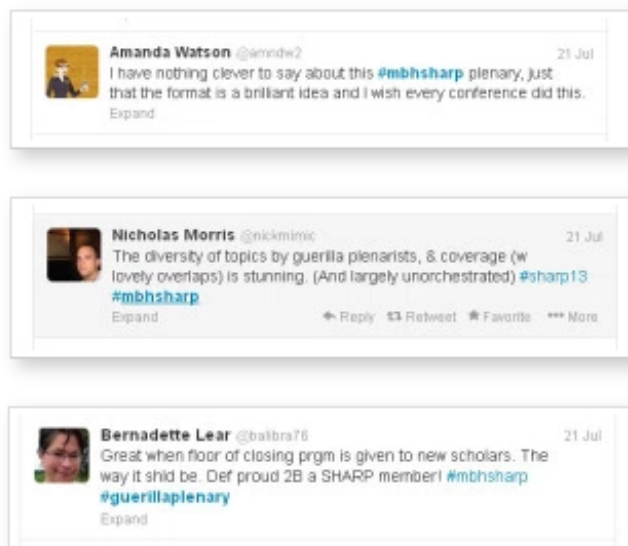
And just like that, its all over. From Thursday to Sunday, we at [RBML](#) hosted the [SHARP](#) conference at Penn. It was a great event by all accounts: technological difficulties were kept to a minimum, great papers were given and heard, and the staff and I were privy to some healthy, albeit heated, dialogue about [SHARP](#)'s present and future direction.

The Conference

Over the course of four days, I became familiar with the conference attendees—he studies this, she writes about that—and was able to both sit in on sessions and strike up conversations with a few scholars about their work. I enjoyed listening in on smalltalk during coffee breaks and was encouraged by the interest that scholars took in their colleagues' study. This year's theme, "[Geographies of the Book](#)," lent itself to a number of presentation's about using [GIS](#) to map different aspects of books and literature (e.g. content, place of publishing, distribution, readership, provenance), including an [interesting keynote](#) by [Ian Gregory](#). [Digital Humanities](#) is a nascent field, and this was evident in presentations and the talk thereafter. The questions implicit in these conversations asked, "[Is](#) this humanities or is this just digital work?"; "Is there appropriate interpretation and historical attention being given to this data and [meta-data](#) or is it just information?". Additional, unanswered questions that were explicitly posed addressed the problems of literature in the digital age, of reconciling a tradition of close reading

with an unprecedented and impossibly large amount of pertinent material. [Ian Gregory](#)'s suggestion of combining close reading with broader "reading" of thousands of sources for "total accountability" seemed plausible, but not possible in the near future, as scholars do not have the tools (programs, [OCR](#)-ready scanned text) to mine the vast amount of textual data that exist.

The conference concluded with a "[guerrilla plenary](#)" in which twelve young scholars were each given five minutes to share their views on [SHARP](#), book history scholarship, and changes they wished to see at the [2014 SHARP conference in Antwerp](#). Overall, the suggestions tended toward inclusion: How can SHARP expand its focus to help teachers teach book history and teach *using* book history? How can SHARP better include and address underrepresented histories of the book (e.g. texts in Asia)? How can SHARP be a leader in gender equality?



— collective twittervrescence

#theinterwebs

In the same way that [SHARP 2013](#) was a showcase for new ideas in digital humanities technology, it also functioned a site for implementation of tried-and-true web 2.0 technologies into the traditional SHARP conference format. [Twitter](#), in particular, was a cause and indicator of much of the excited [chatter](#) around the coffee urn. Academics could be seen tweeting before, after, and often during presentations. A live [twitterfall](#) was used during the guerrilla plenary to show real-time on-line discussion. The jury is still out, however, as to the importance or effectiveness of Twitter in the conference. The most heavily "[live-tweeted](#)" panels and talks were necessarily the least "[paid-attention-to](#)" because of the difficulty of condensing thoughts into 140 characters and listening to scholarly papers simultaneously. On the upside, however, many scholars used twitter to share their favorite one-liners from talks or to continue conversation on what they saw as the most salient points of a presentation.

The Squirrel-Squad

SHARP was a busy four days for the [RBML](#) staff. Donning our neon-green squirrel shirts every morning at [7:00am](#), we helped direct, transport, and feed the over 300 attendees from Thursday morning until Sunday night. A good time was had by all, and we appreciated the thanks of many grateful scholars. During the concluding barbecue on [Shoemaker Green](#), [Roger Chartier](#) himself was gracious enough to shake our hands and say, "thanks to all my green jerseys."



— The Squirrel Squad

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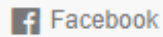
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