

Digital Humanities and Life Writing:

A case study of deep mapping Amsterdam diaries and letters

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“Imagine a digital narrative crisscrossing place and time, starting with the date and location of your birth. The narrative grows, fragments, and connects many places and times together, as your life unfolds and as you tell your story” (Presner, Shepard & Kawano 2014, 12). As (digital) life writing scholars, we are constantly trying to construct such a narrative, which allows us to accurately depict the complexity of human experiences. One of the answers to this question is David Bodenhamer’s concept of the deep map, a geo-spatial representation which combines multiple layers of information (Bodenhamer, Corrigan and Harris, 2015, 1). By constructing a deep map, we can visually connect people, places and time.

The rapidly increasing availability of digital technologies such as GIS (Geographic Information Systems) has enabled scholars to create their own (deep) maps; sparking even a so-called ‘spatial turn’ within humanities research (cf. e.g. Tally 2013). In this paper, I want to demonstrate the value of deep mapping for life writing studies in particular: how we can visually analyse and represent patterns or evolutions within and across life stories through (auto)biographical documents. I will do this by exploring several case studies of Amsterdam diaries and letters, connecting them to their relevant geospatial locations on the digital map. Around these case studies, I will build databases of relevant additional information, consisting of other ego documents, audio-visual material, newspaper articles, archival documents, web based information, etc; which in turn will be plotted on this life writing-based deep map of Amsterdam.

Lastly, in this paper, I want to support the growing mentality within digital humanities to connect and open up our research through Linked Open Data. Shelley Fishkin (2011) envisioned the deep map as interactive digital maps embedded with durable links to archival text and images (along with interpretive materials). Likewise, the databases around my case studies will be build around permalinks, connecting all the information within it to unique resource identifiers online. In this way, I try to adhere to the FAIR-data principles, making my research more findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable.

Sources

Bodenhamer, David J., John Corrigan and Trevor M. Harris, eds. 2015. *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

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Bio Janna Aerts

Janna Aerts studied Linguistics and Literary Studies: Dutch and English at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and spent one semester at University College London in 2014. She completed her PhD in Dutch Literature at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel in 2019, working on a project of the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO) titled “‘Hoe heb ik u nodig dezer dagen.’ Brusselse schrijversdagboeken tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog.’ At present, she is a postdoctoral researcher working on the project ‘Digital interfaces for polyphonic historiography’ within the Amsterdam Time Machine at the University of Amsterdam. Her research focuses on the interaction between (urban) spatiality and daily life within diaries and life writing.