

Mapping and Visualising Transnational (Hi)Stories

June 8-10, 2014 at the University of St Andrews

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Overview

We have created a Google Doc as a live collaborative note document in order to facilitate sharing and meta-discussion . This is an increasingly common practice at unconferences and workshops, especially in the digital humanities. For those of you who are unfamiliar with it it works like this:

1. You can reach this document, which can be edited by anyone at either of these links:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1M_4jAq43OLgtbDITQBfHA115603SFglImyzXv2rlvY/edit?usp=sharing

Short URL equivalent to reach this page:

<http://goo.gl/wQHxz5>

2. The opening section of the document is for general notes by the organisers and overview information. Please avoid editing this section.

3. In the open “Notes” section, all participants are invited to take notes as the workshop proceeds. Consider using hierarchical bullet points. Try to keep these notes to reflecting what transpires in the discussion rather than personal commentary on it.

4. In the “Questions” section consider write up questions or discussion points you hope to raise (feel free to include them whether or not you actually raise them outside the document)

5. In the “Comments” section feel free to write comments

6. In “Links” section put in any links to resources or various readings etc. that come up in the discussion (great for adding later to Zotero).
7. Please stay respectful and avoid pasting in large bodies of text from other documents (instead link to them in the links section).
8. The editing of the document will be disabled about one week after the workshop (so feel free to continue adding information there) but remain accessible to those who has been given the link.
9. A lot of people will be potentially connected to the document at once. It is good practice to avoid editing a sentence in the same paragraph as one that someone else is editing at the same time.

Notes

Please enter your notes on the workshop below in the appropriate section:

MONDAY

Lightning Talks on Research

Bernhard: Transnational history bringing in a new dynamic. Trans. His. as: Movement of flows across borders of people ideas and goods. What strikes me looking at the various projects: On element of space difficult to track is the change in what we are tracking. It seems that history of science seems more forward thinking especially when considering space and institutions. Often find myself saying when reading, “Come on, give me the map!”

Kelsey: Int his. of early modern Europe, 17th century Scotland.
Scotland as periphery - what defines centres and peripheries or margins? Are we spatially too myopic by starting stating that Scotland is periphery? In a “fixed” vision of something like “Europe” it may be peripheral? Are there different spatial approaches that would allow to re/de-centre something like Scotland? Looking forward to see what kinds of tools and approaches will benefit his approach.

Justine:

- looking at a revolt in 1358

- finding that using Google earth leads to all sorts of observations that weren't otherwise possible and believes that this suggests the importance of bringing the geography of ones topic into ones study
- find that either one works on trade or on politics, but when you put the two together and map that, then earlier pictures being to dissolve
- interested in what new software

Scott:

- background in CS
 - worked on the European space agency.
 - interest in data visualisation, exploring the theoretical side of it
 - cited article about "schools of complexity studies", article is "The Shape of the History of Science Profession, 2038: A Prospective Retrospective" by Lynn K. Nyhart [link: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/669895>]
 - whatever the level of analysis, believes there are fundamental features of all networks
 - "structure and dynamics of networks" - very interdisciplinary book [Mark Newman literature: <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mejn/pubs.html>]
 - need to learn programming languages in order to engage with the network literature
 - as historians do we need to enter into this world and engage with this discussion?
- Note from Scott: Here is a list of books on Complex Network literature accumulated by the Barabási Lab: <http://www.barabasilab.com/netlibrary.php>.

Nikos:

- gender and sexuality
- "europeanisation from below"

Erdem:

- research project on occupational structure and labor in urban communities
- the mapping effort launching next year
- Ottoman empire can be used to look at transnational history
- ethnoreligious division of labor, whether there is a connection between occupational choices and residential areas - need to map this first in urban space
- want to digitise the ottoman archives, maps then, and then begin to develop arguments on the basis of them

Rolf:

- exploring a new imaginary cross-border community
- European topography of the "elegant world" - across the European metropolises
- what forms of urban modernity are formed
- focus on the transfer of knowledge on a modern style of living Prague, Vienna, St Petersburg
- source: entertainment generals
- Anna has come up with the idea of the project

Gero:

- The visualisation tools are a valuable way for the team to do the research, easier to grasp the materials
- it allows us to connect the local and the global
- always jumping scales

Tobias:

- the process has helped challenge computer scientists of coming up with new ways of tracking and showing flows

Hans:

- the TIC project - research on journals, congresses, conferences (www.tic.ugent.be)
- seeing these as sites for contestation of existing power structure
- “rooted cosmopolitans” (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20058742>)
- did a small case study focusing on 2 complete congress series 1856-1865 3 three philanthropic congresses, Brussels, Frankfurt, and London

Martin:

- how research can have positive side effects with how people work together
- 2006 working with VennMaker
- most people are interested in the end product of the SNA (social network analysis): the visualisation
- this end product hides all the significant work of the collection and cleaning of data
-

Michael:

- can bring OSM (open street map) into VennMaker
- Michael acts as a bridge between different networks

Uta:

- large cultural collections at large making them accessible (museum, libraries)
- approach from design perspective
- created several visualisations in Trading Consequences but wants to get feedback on them

Tom:

- Looking at a collection of missionaries from Church of Scotland in Africa over a few decades
- new colonial history looking at “arteries” of empire
- mapping these flows is “a way to show the limits of the missionaries’ enterprise”

Konrad:

- upcoming project: long-term networks allow to rethink periodisation and to challenge the ‘1945 as 0 point’ theory
- strong need for technological hybridity among historians

-Best Comment of the Day: Harry Potter Reference: “The Dark Arts of Technology” (positive), role of hybridity in skills.

Georgina:

- three areas:
 - London, creation of market for information
 - Atlantic looking at emerging markets
- looking at the crossover areas

Alex:

- Focusing on Alsace
- cultivation of tobacco in Europe
- actor perspective
 - inspired by work of Bruno Latour
- space perspective

Stefan

- Ibsen skeptical of a “Scandinavian” journal of culture - what you mean, he says, is really a small circle of elites in Copenhagen
- illustrates:
 - need to be attentive to contextual scales
 - exemplifies the asymmetrical nature of transnational networks

Jordan

- works on how the Alps became a consistent transnational space in the wake of the Enlightenment
- working on travelers, external such as British - they realize that the Alps are not just a border but a place that you can explore and have an Alpine experience
- mapping the itineraries of travelers who come through the Alps is step one
- inspired by the mapping the republic of letters
- Link for Mapping the Republic of Letters: <http://www.stanford.edu/group/toolingup/rplviz/>. [click the image]
- at what point do travelers think, “I have entered the alps” - see the shift in the perception

Bernhard

- had a large scale project proposal
- 4 years ago: could one establish a database of European travelers, mostly based on texts stored in various European libraries

- mapping their itineraries
 - “atlas of european travel writing”
- Software Idea: Bernhard and Jordan could co-develop a single software to map the effect mentioned in both presentations [border visualizations via the letters]. This could be done by creating a single database for the letter metadata, and having an indicator/ID in the code for region (e.g. Swiss/Alps Region = 1, Germany/Poland Region = 2, Another Region = 3, etc). You could include a small prototype in a second grant application.

Open Discussion on Research

Konrad

- the historian as practitioner: dialectic between hypothesis, heuristics and data / sources

Justine:

- We are often as historians trained in close reading, but these new approaches can break us out of a historical impasse
- one more tool to look at phenomena but not a replacement for close reading

Tobias:

- small scales of historians
- there is very high quality but very small scale data but would be nice to explore way to connect this with the larger scales

Jordan:

two points around the micro/macro issue:

- at some point, each project will have a collaborative aspiration (multiple possibilities for expansion, etc). We should assume that our projects should be made available and open. This could be the more ‘universal’ side of each DH project
- problem of big ‘macro’ projects (for instance, mapping travellers to Poland and the Alps in ONE common database): need to clarify what is included, what is not (otherwise users might get lost or some wrong assumptions might be made out of the absence of data)

Erdem:

- visualisation can talk to one another

VennMaker Presentation

- Types of
 - complete networks
 - egocentric networks
- Types of research:
 - quantitative

- qualitative
 - more open and flexible
 - exploration of meaning
 - for purpose of getting to the stories behind the ties
 - classification of ideal types of networks
 - understanding the subjective perspective
- Disadvantages to both:
 - qual: can't generalize the results
 - qual: time consuming data generating process
 - quant: time consuming
 - quant: what is the meaning in my data?

VennMaker

- combines aspects of quant and qualitative approaches
- visual data collection
- visual audio statistic and geographical data is saved
- export of data to other tools
- calculating basic statistical measures

Social network analysis: tools and links

VennMaker

<http://www.vennmaker.com>

R

<http://www.r-project.org/>

R package for network analysis: igraph

<http://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/igraph/index.html>

IDE for R: RStudio

<http://www.rstudio.com/products/rstudio/download/>

pajek

<http://vlado.fmf.uni-lj.si/pub/networks/pajek/>

gephi

<https://gephi.org/>

Java and OpenStreetMap

<http://wiki.openstreetmap.org/wiki/JMapView>

Geotools

<http://www.geotools.org/>

Example shapefiles: China Historical GIS

<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~chgis/data/chgis/downloads/v4/>

Trading Consequences

TUESDAY

Lightning Talk on Approaches

Konrad

- strong interest in encoding ambiguity; how can we confront
- how to tackle problems of ambiguity (deriving from Japanese, Korean sources - and questions such as identity)
- balance between heuristic and analytics when producing maps and visualisations
- funding: we do not have the full picture

Rolf:

- “mirroring” and text transfer between one journal to a new one. - a transformation takes place through this process

Anna:

- demonstrates a digital collection of newspapers in Vienna
- anno.onb.ac.at - Austrian Newspapers Online
- ANNO - Historische Zeitungen und Zeitschriften
- technical description of the beta version: <http://anno.onb.ac.at/suchhilfe.htm>
- multilingual text search option; including group of words with “Abstandsuche”
- public access to all searchable resources of the database
- can search by time, by theme
- you can also search by space through a visualisation by google maps
- directly from the map you can open up issues of the newspaper
- you can also see a chronological overview, by year
- choosing a single day you can see a series of front pages of different newspapers at the same time.
- the theater project, for example - you can easily cross-reference the media coverage in several areas and see if there is a correspondence between the number of people who come from an area and the coverage of the area

Gero

- the problem of linking the local and the global (Bayreuth; trying to map the proliferation of modern, Europe-style opera / theatre architecture; and circulation of theatre groups)

For non-European theatres one can look into Constantinople and Cairo theaters. A new PhD on the subject: Adam Mestyan, Central European University, Budapest, 2011:
<http://www.adammestyan.com>

- creating a resource where people can upload information about local data

Michael

- how do you visualise missing data
- are there no relations or is there missing data about the relation “the known unknowns” and the “unknown knowns”
- how can we ensure the longterm preservation of our visualisations
- if you use a dynamic visualisation - we need to preserve not only the data but the environment needed to produce it

Stefan

- Stefan is looking at where intellectuals are and where they move
- the example of U of Helsinki as a microcosm of the country's intellectual - France another example
- In Italy Risorgimento constructed essentially abroad
- Looks at the peripheral context for the European case
- Thankful for the workshop because has already come up with new ideas of exploring network approaches in new ways
- VennMaker for example would make certain things visible

Erdam

- Without the visualisations it is not really possible to express the results of the projects.
- Wants to learn what is “doable”
- If you try to do something like this, you are lost in your sources (a million records)
- on the issues of “boundaries” - physical space makes a huge impact in the research - comparison across space - whether these are across national spaces
- static maps have considerable limitations (as opposed to dynamic ones)

Scott

- Network software and approaches has grown out of the growing scales we are confronting
- we see more advanced network structures
- even for something as simple as the growing size of cities
- two different skill sets:

- 5, 10, 100 people network -
-
-

Hans

- presents a platform that allows correction of transcriptions (crowdsourced), and add comments
 - verdian.dlconsulting.com/ghent
- presentation of node goat that allows the creation of relational databases
- advertising Nodegoat (single user research for free)

Kelsey

- the ambiguous place of the visualisation in our research
- sometimes as an archive, sometimes a result, sometimes a heuristic tool
- then how do we go about incorporating the tool into a larger project?
- how do we decide on when and how to invest the time and money and decide the risk/payoff of doing a visualisation project - it is a major investment.
- how do we decide when it is worth doing and when it isn't

Alex

- what is the relationship between visualisation and speech
- the usefulness of the image in presentations (conferences) but the tension between word (speech) and the image
- gets the feeling that we simply cannot visualise complexity

Tobias

- supports the iterative process between historians and computers scientists
- do historians need to learn programming languages: no
- but they should participate in the process of modeling data structures
 - if the programmer is doing it alone, they

A counter suggestion from Erdem about the point that historians do not need to acquire computer science skills: <http://programminghistorian.org>

Nikos

- what voices are contained and what voices are left out?
- need to be attentive to the experiences ____
- are the colors etc. of our visualisations linked to the subjects we study?
- there has been an explosion of studies of sensory history
- can visualisations enhance these narratives of sensory history (though not replace them)

Jordan

- what is the role of DH in graduate education and the PhD

- how much (of a PhD project) can we dedicate to the visualisation - what proportion of the 80,000 words?
- Page Morgan "How to get a DH project off the ground" six points:
 - don't be too quick to make project part of a PhD dissertation
 - investigate the IP issues early on
 - search the web if similar projects exist
 - talk to people about it and give "lightning talks" and conference talks about it
 - what is the smallest version of your project and start with that
 - know the platform you work with may change, don't get dedicated to one, and experiment

Georgina

- how do visualisations and the text relate to each other
- thinking of economic history
- how can visualisations help us visualise "the spaces in between"

Tom

- agrees that visualisations are really helpful when presenting research
- people can immediately connect with a visualisation
- the local isn't always micro and the global isn't always macro
- remains skeptical of subsuming local interests and contexts in a big overall narrative

Bernhard

- what are the kind of maps we have seen
- are they tools, are they archives, do they give a new spin on something
- one example: *Atlas de la Révolution française*
- Made during the bicentenary - spatial representation of France in the 1790s
- if transnational history wants to trace things across space, can maps encapsulate the complexity?
- they tend to be black and white
- are we making our lives too difficult by being post-Foucauldians? Or be more straightforward that point out as we go the limitations of what we are doing
- when we put an article or monograph on the table we tend to think that, "that is it"
- we should be more explicit, what we creates doesn't tell the whole story
- history is about raising the level of complexity
- we shouldn't shy away from it even if it doesn't show everything we might like it to
- could we have an image of what an atlas on transnational history might look like?
- on funding: are we just not being bold enough? do we pull out because

Discussion & Reflections: The Way Forward

Questions

Please write questions and proposed discussion issues in the appropriate section below:

MONDAY

Lightning Talks on Research

- As historians do we need to make an effort to learn the programming languages etc. that enable us to engage with network literature?
- How do we track change in the objects/subjects we study?
- What are the data that allow us to write spatial histories?
- How do we deal with the problem between the quantitative and qualitative as well as scales between micro and macro? (something that may be relevant in projects such as Erdem's, Tom's) - or the local and the global (as with global Wagner from Gero and Tobias)
- @ Bernhard's "On element of space difficult to track is the change in what we are tracking." Interesting article is http://www.jstor.org/stable/3321721?_redirected about the transfer of the concept of 'cité-jardins', but also on the change of the meaning of this concept in different countries/areas.
- How to "jump" scales? An important question as we are mainly, thus far, either looking at larger-scale data projects (based on data mining, Uta Hinrichs, Trading consequences) OR micro-scales in following individuals, objects, commodities
- Data in global and transnational history and the problem and challenge of documents in different languages
- Big question here: Who is a historian? Theatre historians and the focus on aesthetics "only". Does that resonate with Franco Moretti's "close" and "distant" reading?
- Back to the question of data with social-network analysis and VennMaker: assembling data, cleaning data

-How to we generate more open-ended research questions - with mapping, space and visualisation in mind?

-Discussing the relationships between those with strong technology backgrounds and historians who often see the former as building something to spec. The problem of collaboration and sharing - pressing for the value of the hybrid role. Manifesto for: trying to avoid the hierarchies of relationships when engaging in interdisciplinary projects. Inviting those with the strong technology background into the design of the research, and asking the historians to become familiar with the tools and approaches.

-Can we think of collaborating on an api, or a common format to help exchange between overlapping and matching datasets?

Open Discussion on Research

VennMaker Presentation

Trading Consequences

-approaches Text Mining and Information Visualisation

-starting point: lexicon of commodities; 500,000 commodities terms

-question: how to deal with text (e.g. synonyms, different languages)

-Question: on the one hand it shows the global dimensions and spatial dimensions of commodities (e.g. sugar); but I can see the critique of “western centric” as reliant on English language only

-basis: D3 web-based free software; but be aware - a steep learning curve ahead

TUESDAY

Lightning Talk on Approaches

Discussion & Reflections: The Way Forward

Comments

Please share comments below:

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Links and Readings

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