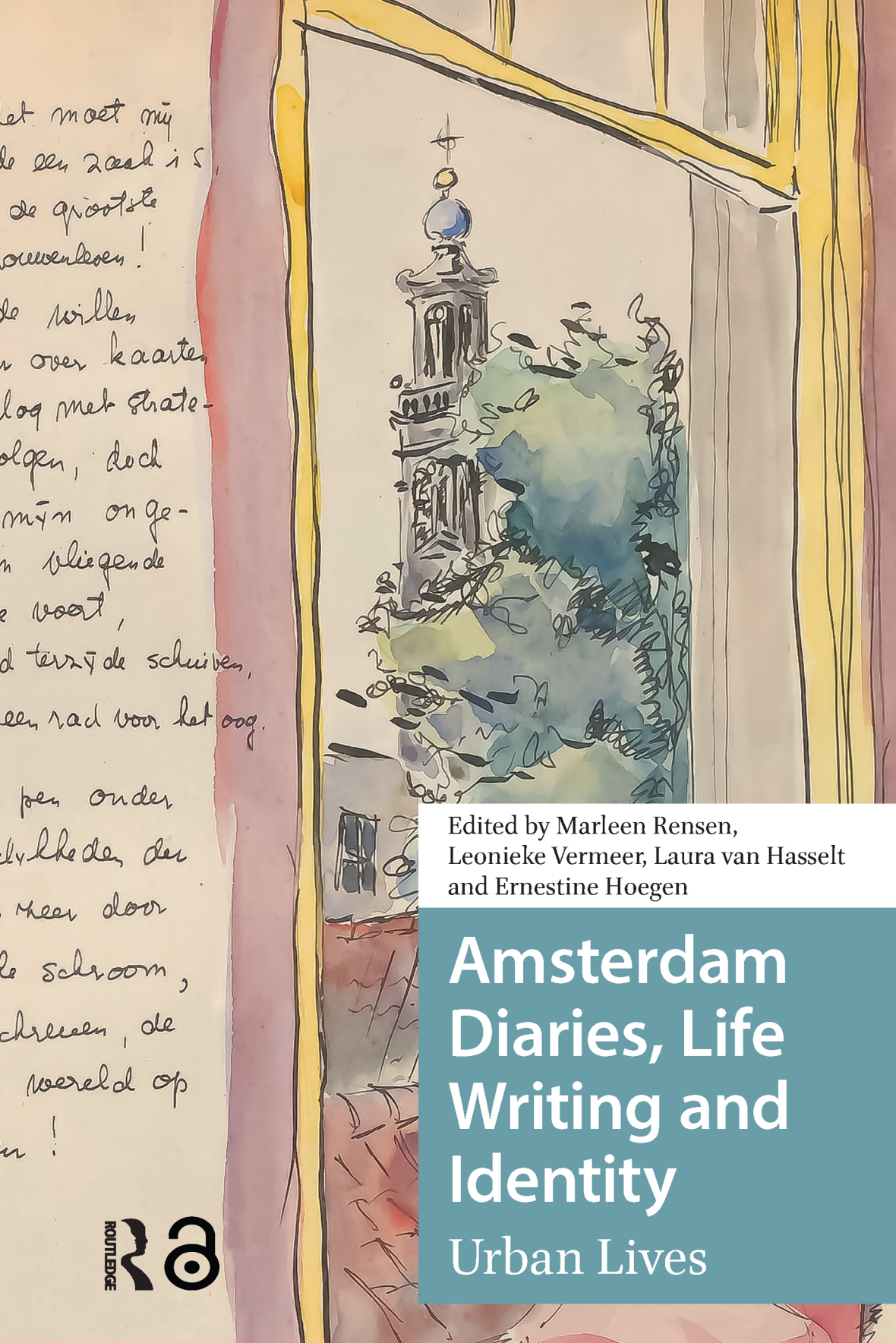

Edited by Marleen Rensen, Leonieke Vermeer, Laura van Hasselt and Ernestine Hoegen

Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity

Urban Lives

ROUTLEDGE

Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity

Urban Lives

Edited by
Marleen Rensen,
Leonieke Vermeer,
Laura van Hasselt and
Ernestine Hoegen

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

Cover illustration: “Waarom ik dit boek schrijf” (“Why I am writing this book”) and “Vue de mon bureau—Aug. 1944” (“The view from my desk—August 1944”). Opening page from the second volume (“Black book”) of Toby Vos’s diary, featuring a watercolour view from her home at Rozenstraat 56 III onto the Westerkerk tower. Toby Vos Diary, 1944–63, EGO/65B, Atria Institute on Gender Equality and Women’s History.

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden
Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

First published in 2025 by Amsterdam University Press Ltd.

Published 2025 by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

ISBN: 978-90-4856-973-1 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-04-117551-3 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-00-369073-3 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003690733

For Product Safety Concerns and Information please contact our EU representative:
GPSR@taylorandfrancis.com
Taylor & Francis Verlag GmbH, Kaufingerstraße 24, 80331 München, Germany

Table of Contents

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of Programmabureau Amsterdam 750, the Open Access Book Fund of the University of Groningen, the Professor Van Winter Fund, the Hendrik Mullerfonds and Samenwerkende Maritieme Fondsen, whose contributions enabled the open access publication of this volume. We also wish to thank our student assistants David Batelaan, Noortje Beg, Berber van der Kaaij and Emma van Herwijnen, for their invaluable help during the preparation of the manuscript.

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

1. Introduction: Amsterdam in Diaries and Life Writing

Marleen Rensen and Leonieke Vermeer

Abstract: This introduction outlines the central theme of the volume: the representation of Amsterdam in diaries and other modes and forms of life writing. It situates this theme within the broader context of diary studies and urban history and addresses the crossovers between these fields of study. With the aim to grasp the interplay between self and city in urban lives, it explores various approaches to examining how the city has influenced and shaped individual identities, as well as how self-representations have, in turn, contributed to the shaping of the city's imagery and urban fabric. The structure of the volume is explained through an overview of its five thematic sections: "Coming of Age," "Belonging," "Routes and Routines," "Digital Lives" and a "Creative Section."

Keywords: personal narratives; autobiography; urban history; identity; migration; self-representation

In the summer of 1944, female Dutch illustrator and cartoonist Toby Vos (1918–2019) started keeping an illustrated diary about her life in Amsterdam. She depicted the interior of her house in the Jordaan area, as well as the city's scenery outside, covering Dam Square, Vondelpark, strings of cyclists in the streets and people with handcarts transporting food. No references are made to the Amsterdam-based resistance circles she was involved in, presumably because that was too risky.

Vos simultaneously used two long-sized, unruled notebooks with a hard cover, one in blue, one in black.[1] The cover sheet of the "Blue book" shows

1 Toby Vos's diary consists of two parts: a "Blue book" (part 1) and a "Black book" (part 2). She herself referred to the first, with its blue cover, as the "Blue book." Toby Vos, Dagboek, deel 2 (the "Black book"). Both the "Blue" and "Black" books are stored in the collection of the Atria

Rensen, Marleen, Leonieke Vermeer, Laura van Hasselt and Ernestine Hoegen, eds. *Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity: Urban Lives*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2025.
DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-1

the logo of the store where she bought them; the stationary shop owned by the Winter brothers at Rozengracht, a well-known company in the city centre, close to where she lived. The logo mentions "A'dam" and contains the symbolic three Xs of the city's flag and coat of arms. Thus, taking into account the materiality and content of Vos's diary, there is good reason to say that it is firmly located in Amsterdam.

The first page of the black notebook is decorated with a miniature painting of the interior of Vos's house at Rozenstraat 56 III, situated on the third floor. The caption reads: "Vue de mon bureau—Aug. 1944."[2] The painting in watercolour foregrounds a window which looks out onto the tower of the Westerkerk, an iconic church in the Jordaan area. The yellow window frames—surrounded by a pink wall—look like the outline of a painting. Not only the colours draw attention to this framework, it's also the pillow lying folded on the windowsill which seduces viewers to reach out and touch it. With this superb window painting, shown on the cover of this volume, Vos makes clear that her diary offers a view on the city, as she observed it and captured it in art.

Even though the diary of Toby Vos stands out as an artistic creation, it poignantly illustrates the more general idea that diaries provide a unique window into the personal perceptions and experiences of the city. All diaries, whether illustrated or not, and regardless of their artistic value, offer a subjective perspective on urban life that is inherently filtered, fragmented and mediated. Just as Vos visualized it in the watercolour of her window onto the Westerkerk, the outer world is seen from the subject's interior and presented in the specific medium of an illustrated diary.

Interestingly, the Westerkerk depicted in her diary is the same church referred to by Anne Frank, who lived in hiding on Prinsengracht, at the other, northern side of the church. From a window in the attic, she could see the blue imperial crown on top of the tower. In her diary, the Secret Annex (Achterhuis), Anne Frank wrote that she loved to hear the clock of the Westerkerk, as the sound "reassured" her.[3] The chiming bells of the church must have been familiar to Vos, too. This shared soundscape symbolically

Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History and have been included in digital form in Delpher. Dagboek Toby Vos, 1944–63, EGO/65B, Atria, https://geheugen.delpher.nl/nl/geheugen/view?coll=ngvn&identifier=EVDO01%3AIIAV002_IAV001000031.

2 Toby Vos, Dagboek, deel 2.

3 Anne Frank, Dagboek, 11 July 1942, as cited in: Anne Frank, Otto Frank and Mirjam Pressler, *Het Achterhuis: Anne Frank* (Prometheus, 2019). The diary was published in Dutch in 1947 as *Het Achterhuis*. After a French edition (1950), a German one followed (also in 1950). In 1952, two English versions were published, one for Great Britain and the other for the US. Anne Frank's

connects the lives of two women in Amsterdam during the Second World War, one of whom would become the most famous diarist in the world.

Diaries and Other Stories of the Self

The diary of Anne Frank, which is a particularly powerful testament to the human impact of the Holocaust, illustrates Amsterdam's deep historical connection to personal narratives. One of the first readers of Anne Frank's diary was Jacques Presser, a Jewish historian and Holocaust survivor who later became a professor at the University of Amsterdam. In the mid-1950s, Presser introduced the term "egodocuments" to describe the types of texts he found particularly compelling: autobiographies, memoirs, diaries, personal letters and other documents "in which an ego deliberately or accidentally discloses or hides itself."[4]

Today, Amsterdam has emerged as a key centre for the preservation and study of diaries and other egodocuments. Archives such as the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, the Dutch Diary Archive, the City Archives, the Atria Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History and IHLIA (for LGBTI heritage) house rich collections of personal narratives. In addition to this, recent initiatives such as the Black Archives and the Muslim Archive are actively engaged in collecting heritage material and stories. Beyond these institutional collections, the city itself is brimming with stories of its diverse inhabitants, both recorded and remembered.

This volume explores the various ways in which the city of Amsterdam emerges in diaries and other self-narratives of "ordinary" people from the eighteenth century to the present day. Most contributions in this volume originate from the conference "Urban Lives: Amsterdam Diaries and Other Stories of the Self," held from 26 to 28 October 2023 and hosted by the University of Amsterdam and the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The conference was organized in anticipation of Amsterdam's 750th anniversary in October 2025, with the dual aim of contributing to the city's long history of cultural diversity and fostering cross-fertilization between urban history and diary studies.

diary is now available in over seventy-five languages. Anne Frank House, "The Publication of the Diary," https://www.annefrank.org/en/anne-frank/diary/publication-diary/.

4 Jacques Presser, "Clio kijkt door het sleutelgat," in *Uit het werk van J. Presser*, 283–95, as cited by Arianne Baggerman and Rudolf Dekker, "Jacques Presser, Egodocuments and the Personal Turn in Historiography," *European Journal of Life Writing* 7 (2018): 93. Presser initially wrote the word with a hyphen, though this later disappeared.

Recent years have witnessed a critical reassessment of the standard historical account of diary writing. According to this traditional narrative, a revolutionary cultural shift occurred in the Western world during the Renaissance period, placing increasing emphasis on the individual's sense of self. This newfound focus on individualism gave new impetus to autobiographical forms of writing, including the diary, which came to be regarded as a key literary expression of the modern individual.[5] However, this narrative has been subject to significant critiques. The first and most notable critique relates to the assumption that the autobiographical self—whether expressed in diaries, memoirs or autobiography—was inherently male, leading to the exclusion of women's diaries from canonical accounts. Feminist scholars have drawn attention to this "gender paradox," summarized as follows by diary scholar Desirée Henderson: "The most celebrated and canonical diaries are those written by men but the genre as a whole is characterized as feminine."[6]

In the Netherlands, groundbreaking archival projects have taken stock of egodocuments dating from 1500 to 1918, shedding further light on this paradox.[7] These inventories reveal that only 10 per cent of the preserved self-narratives—including diaries—were written by women.[8] The reasons

5 Desirée Henderson, *How to Read a Diary: Critical Contexts and Interpretive Strategies for 21st-Century Readers* (Routledge, 2019), 9.

6 Ibid., 12–13, 54–58. For an overview of feminist critics and theorists, see: Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2nd ed. (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 210–11. This chapter is not included in the new, updated version of the book: Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography Now: An Updated Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 3rd ed. (University of Minnesota Press, 2024). See also: Mineke Bosch, Monica Soeting and Marijke Huisman, "Gender and Life-Writing Today—An Introduction," *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* 19, no. 3 (2016): 291–99; Angelika Schaser, "Gender," in *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, ed. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (De Gruyter, 2019), 287–92.

7 The inventories of manuscripts are available via the "Inventarisaties egodocumenten" tab on the Onderzoeksinstituut Egodocument en Geschiedenis website (http://www.egodocument.net). The first inventory (of egodocuments from the period 1500–1814) has also been published: Ruud Lindeman, Yvonne Scherf, Arianne Baggerman and Rudolf Dekker, eds, *Egodocumenten van Nederlanders uit de zestiende tot begin negentiende eeuw: Repertorium* (Panchaud, 2016). The inventory of Dutch egodocuments appearing in print in the period 1813–1914 is available on the Huygens website (http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/egodocumenten). For an evaluation of these projects, see: Leonieke Vermeer, "Stretching the Archives: Ego-documents and Life Writing Research in the Netherlands: State of the Art." *BMGN—Low Countries Historical Review* 135, no. 1 (2020): 31–69.

8 Arianne Baggerman and Rudolf Dekker, "Autobiografisch schrijven in Nederland: Ontwikkelingen van de zestiende eeuw tot begin negentiende eeuw," in Lindeman et al. (2016), cf. 11–12, 22. The estimate of "at most 10%" refers to the period 1500–1814. For egodocuments from the period 1850–1918, data is only available for published autobiographies. Between 1850 and 1918,

for this disparity remain underexplored. While limited literacy among women—even within the bourgeoisie—has been suggested as one factor, this does not fully account for the discrepancy.[9] Equally important are the gender biases that have historically shaped the collection and preservation of self-narratives, with men's writings often regarded as more valuable or authoritative.[10] Interestingly, the Dutch Diary Archive, which preserves diaries spanning from the nineteenth century to the present, offers a contrasting picture: diaries written by women seem to be in the majority.[11] This suggests that contemporary archival practices are beginning to redress historical imbalances. Yet much work remains to uncover and amplify diverse voices, a task to which this volume contributes by presenting diaries and other self-narratives from a wide range of individuals, including those of different genders and identities, thus broadening our understanding of personal storytelling.

The second critique on the standard narrative of diary history addresses the Western-centric perspective that overlooks diary or diary-like forms of self-narration in non-Western societies.[12] To confront such limitations, the field of life writing studies has proven particularly valuable. Emerging in the wake of feminist and postcolonial criticism of the 1970s and 1980s, life writing scholars challenged dominant historiographies and foregrounded the importance of underrepresented perspectives. As a critical and inclusive category, life writing encompasses a wide array of self-representational forms and practices, including diaries. Since the 1990s, life writing studies has expanded significantly, not only in scope but also in methodological and theoretical sophistication. Scholars in this field have made important

only 6.5 per cent of autobiographies originally published in Dutch were written by women. Marijke Huisman, *Publieke Levens: Autobiografieën op de Nederlandse boekenmarkt 1850–1918* (Walburg Pers, 2008), 211.

9 Baggerman and Dekker, "Autobiografisch," 22.

10 Leonieke Vermeer, "Tiny Symbols Tell Big Stories. Naming and Concealing Masturbation in Diaries (1660–1940)," *European Journal of Life Writing* 6 (2017): 106; Maria Tamboukou, "Reassembling Documents of Life in the Archive," *European Journal of Life Writing* 6 (2017): 15–16.

11 The collection of the Dutch Diary Archive continues to grow steadily and now consists of approximately three hundred sets of egodocuments (including diaries, memoirs and travel accounts) that vary greatly in size. The oldest diaries date from the mid-nineteenth century, with the majority of the collection originating from the twentieth century (https://www.dagboekarchief.nl/collectie/). The Dutch Diary Archive is still in the process of mapping the entire collection. Among the authors whose complete records have been documented, 115 are men, 142 are women and in four cases, the gender remains unknown. This information was obtained through email correspondence with Lidy Jansen, information specialist and coordinator of the Dutch Diary Archive, 16 January 2025.

12 Henderson, *How to Read a Diary*, 13.

strides in exploring global and multicultural practices of self-narration, particularly in contexts where marginalized voices, such as slave narratives, were excluded by dominant historiographies.[13]

These insights challenge the idea that diaries are exclusively a product of Western individualism and open up new questions about the formation of the self, as well as genre definitions and distinctions.[14] The long-assumed causal link between individualism and diary writing has been further challenged by insights from the Dutch inventories of egodocuments mentioned earlier. These inventories demonstrate a sharp rise in such documents after 1780 and into the so-called "golden age" of the diary in the nineteenth century.[15] Interestingly, many of these texts were not intimate or introspective but took the form of "impersonal" egodocuments, such as pre-printed, template-like diaries and calendars that recorded mundane details of daily life. Rather than focusing on the inner self, most egodocuments engaged with the (rapidly) changing world around them. Building on these findings and inspired by the theories of Reinhart Koselleck, historian Arianne Baggerman hypothesized that the flourishing of autobiographical writing is better explained by a shifting sense of time and historical awareness. She argues that individuality was not the driver of this autobiographical impulse but, instead, its result.[16]

Building on these critiques of the traditional understanding of diary history, the diary has increasingly been understood as a heterogeneous and "transgressive" genre—one that challenges clear-cut boundaries relating to form, function, authorship, modes of publicity and literary status. Yet, certain "distinctive elements" remain fundamental to the genre, such as the diaristic order of time and place, stemming from its genetic relationship to the account book.[17] Surely, some diaries treated in this volume exemplify

13 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* (2010), 193–211; Mita Banerjee, "Life Writing," in *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, ed. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (De Gruyter, 2019), 336–37; François-Joseph Ruggiu, ed., *The Uses of First Person Writings: Africa, America, Asia, Europe* (Peter Lang, 2013).

14 Batsheva Ben-Amos and Dan Ben-Amos, eds, *The Diary: The Epic of Everyday Life* (Indiana University Press, 2020), 4.

15 Baggerman and Dekker, "Autobiografisch," 11–12. For the term "golden age of the diary," see Peter Gay, *Education of the Senses*, volume 1 of *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud* (Norton, 1984), 446.

16 Arianne Baggerman, "Lost Time: Temporal Discipline and Historical Awareness in Nineteenth Century Dutch Egodocuments," in *Controlling Time and Shaping the Self: Developments in Autobiographical Writing since the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Arianne Baggerman, Rudolf Dekker and Michael Mascuch (Brill 2011), 467.

17 Philippe Lejeune, *On Diary*. ed. Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. Kathy Durnin (University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 51–60; Schamma Schahadat, "Diary" in *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, ed. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (De Gruyter, 2019), 548–49.

this order with strictly regular entries without missing a single day, whereas others break from this convention by using irregular dates—or rarely give a date or a place at all.

In sum, diary and life writing scholarship has broadened the scope of self-narratives to include a diversity of voices and texts. Greater attention is being paid to non-Western, oral, and non-written forms of self-representation.[18] Furthermore, the digital revolution and the advent of social media requires ways to take into account new modes of self-expression and self-fashioning, including digital forms of journaling.[19]

Most contributions in this volume centre around diaries (Van Hasselt, Özkan Hoeijmakers and Van Hasselt, North, Buchheim and Hoegen, Buijs), but the focus extends far beyond this form. Other types of life writing are also examined, such as memoirs (Grantsaan), letters (Beyens), legal depositions (Jansen), creative writing (Weytingh) and a conversation on an autobiography (Castillo Soto). This book further includes analyses of non-textual self-representations, such as oral histories (Seriese), storytelling performances (Gülbudak), visual sources (Oostdijk), and visual arts (Doornekamp). Additionally, the evolving nature of life writing is reflected in new digital modes of mapping lives, including data visualizations (Lenart Cheng and Van Wissen et al.) and "post-digital" journaling, referring to the interdependence of online and analogue technologies (Rak).

This volume further expands and challenges the boundaries of life writing by revisiting the crucial question: whose lives are told and represented? While the focus remains on human lives—particularly those of "ordinary" individuals in Amsterdam from the early modern period onward—this volume introduces a novel dimension by incorporating non-human lives. These include animals, such as the dogs featured in Jansen's contribution, and even inanimate objects, like the bicycle that serves as the "gravitational point" of life writing in Weytingh's creative piece.

Diary Studies and Urban History

It is the aim of this volume to bridge the gap between diary studies and urban history. Both fields have gained prominence in the humanities in recent decades, yet their intersections remain underexplored. *Amsterdam Diaries,*

18 Henderson, *How to Read a Diary*, 9–15; Schaser, "Gender," 289.

19 Julie Rak and Anna Poletti, *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2014).

Life Writing and Identity seeks to stimulate dialogue and open new avenues to investigate urban lives. Focusing on the interplay between the self and the city, we look closely into the different ways in which self-constructions in diaries and other life writing genres relate to the urban environment in which they were written.

Diaries, as treasured historical sources that provide access to individual experiences and practices, can offer a wealth of material on daily life in the city. For centuries, people have kept diaries in which they record their emotions, thoughts, behaviours, routines and encounters in the context of urban settings. These writings bear traces of diverse social and material aspects of city life: how people lived, navigated town, walked the streets, worked, socialized and felt familiar or uncomfortable in particular places. Yet, diaries are often overlooked in both urban history and the broader field of urban studies.

Notably, *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Urban Literary Studies* (2018) contains entries on "autobiography," "autobiografiction" and "biography," but omits any on "diary" or "journal." This is surprising, given that many writers were also diarists who extensively described their urban surroundings and used them as a stimulus for creative expression. The *Encyclopedia* does, however, include entries on individual authors, such as Walter Benjamin, who wrote about his "metropolitan childhood" in *A Berlin Chronicle* (1932), which he developed into *Berlin Childhood around 1900*.[20] His work, which was partly inspired by Baudelaire's flâneur, centres on observing urban life—its cafés, shops, monuments, and market halls.[21] Similarly, an entry on Virginia Woolf examines the role of walking in London in *Mrs Dalloway*,[22] similar to the flâneuse, but neglects Woolf's passion for diary writing and the fact that she kept a "city diary" alongside a "country diary" for some time.[23]

Recent literary and cultural studies of the city have shifted the perspective from the observing intellectual flâneur and flâneuse to the urban

20 Jeremy Tambling, "Walter Benjamin," in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Urban Literary Studies*, ed. Jeremy Tambling (Palgrave, 2022), 191–93; Jeremy Tambling, "Benjamin, Walter: *Berlin Childhood around 1900*," in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Urban Literary Studies*, ed. Jeremy Tambling (Palgrave, 2022), 200–210.

21 Ben Moore, "The Flâneur," in *The Encyclopedia of Urban Literary Studies*, ed. Jeremy Tambling (Palgrave: 2022), 661–66.

22 Ian Fong, "Woolf, Virginia, *Mrs Dalloway*," in *The Encyclopedia of Urban Literary Studies*, ed. Jeremy Tambling (Palgrave: 2022), 1913–19.

23 Barbara Lounsberry, *Virginia Woolf's Modernist Path: Her Middle Diaries & the Diaries She Read* (University of Press of Florida, 2019), 1.

experiences of "ordinary" people.[24] Diaries, however, seem to be used only rarely in this context as sources for textual analysis. Social science research does emphasize the value of diaries for exploring day-to-day urban life, but mainly makes use of solicited logbook-like diaries to trace daily urban rhythms and routines, rather than personally motivated diaries.[25] Historical studies that have examined diaries stored in archives have, likewise, employed quantitative methods to large diary collections for research on urban mobility and transport experiences.[26]

The emphasis on mobility correlates with the "spatial turn" in the humanities and social sciences, which has been critical for urban studies. Urban space, like space more generally, is no longer viewed as a passive backdrop for human behaviour but as something that actively shapes and is shaped by human interactions. This shift underscores the importance of exploring experiential aspects of urban life, something diaries uniquely reveal. Many diaries and memoirs record not only how people navigate the city, they also bear traces of affective and sensory experiences, such as the smell of the rope yards, the sounds of street sellers, the sight of boats and the stuffy atmosphere in packed trams. Studying these sources can, thus, contribute to a palpable history of a city like Amsterdam.

Historians often emphasize that diaries and other egodocuments must be handled with caution because of their subjective nature and therefore, recommend reading them "in tandem with other sorts of sources."[27] However, scholars in the field of life writing and diary studies tend to read egodocuments on their own terms and examine the subjectivity of the source, looking closely into the subject's self-construction. In urban history, research could benefit from the theories and methods of autobiography and diary studies, which have long-standing traditions of (close) reading and interpreting self-narratives.

24 Christoph Ehland and Pascal Fischer, "General Introduction," in *Resistance and the City: Negotiating Urban Identities: Race, Class and Gender* (Brill/Rodopi, 2018), 7.

25 See, for example, Alan Latham, "Using Diaries to Study Urban Worlds," in *Researching the City: A Guide for Students*, ed. Kevin Ward (Sage, 2014), 99–115.

26 See, for instance, Colin G. Pooley, "Travelling through the City: Using Life Writing to Explore Individual Experiences of Urban Travel, c. 1840–1940," *Mobilities* 12, no. 4 (2017): 598–609. Also, an older, Amsterdam-based sociological study by Velibor Vidaković makes use of solicited diaries, *Mens, Tijd en Ruimte. De dagboeken van 1400 Amsterdammers; een essay gebaseerd op onderzoek naar activiteiten en verplaatsingen van inwoners uit drie stadsdelen* (Dienst Ruimtelijke Ordening Amsterdam, 1980).

27 Sarah Deutsch, "Novels, Autobiographies, and Memoirs," in *Doing Spatial History*, ed. Riccardo Bavaj (Routledge, 2022), 73.

Conversely, diary studies would be enriched by a stronger focus on related historical sources and by attending to subjectivities in relation to place and lived emplacement. After all, "life takes place," to borrow the title of a book by geographer David Seamon.[28] Autobiography studies have always accounted for the significance of space and place in self-narratives by inspecting, among other things, the scene of writing and someone's self-positioning in "social, geographic, and geopolitical locations."[29] In diary studies, however, the spatial dimension has been secondary to the time dimension, maybe because the genre is so clearly of a temporal nature. While some scholars, like Desirée Henderson, have explored the "spatiality" of diaries, their focus has primarily been on the arrangement of the space on a diary page.[30] Nevertheless, as a pioneering case study of Etty Hillesum's Amsterdam-based diary has shown, it is worthwhile to also take into account the spatial scene of journaling, as well as of the locations referenced, even in introspective diaries as Hillesum's, focused more on the interior self than on external surroundings.[31]

Diaries written by city dwellers during times of crisis and war are especially valuable to historians of the everyday, as they often document changes in the urban environment. Philippe Lejeune's concept of "crisis diaries" reflects the phenomenon that people tend to start documenting their lives during turbulent times in order to track transitions and make sense of new realities.[32] Typically, the oldest known Amsterdam diary—that of the monk Wouter Jacobsz, which he kept in the years 1572 to 1579—records the misery and gloomy mood in the streets when Amsterdam was besieged by the Spaniards.[33] A contemporary example of crisis diaries can be taken from Covid times. The pandemic diaries of the twenty-first century testify to the city's eerie desolation—symbolically captured in images of an empty Dam square—and offer insights into the ways in which this changed lifeworld has affected its inhabitants.[34]

28 David Seamon, *Life Takes Place: Phenomenology, Lifeworlds and Placemaking* (Routledge, 2018).

29 See, for instance, Smith and Watson, "Space and Place" in *Reading Autobiography* (2010), 248–49.

30 Henderson, *How to Read a Diary*, 80–81.

31 Babs Boter, "'Zo net een ijsclubje gelopen, veerkrachtig en gelukkig.' Etty Hillesums ruimtelijke ervaringen van Amsterdam," in *Etty Hillesum over God en Lot*, ed. K. van Smelik, L. Bergen, M. Clement, P. Couto, G. van Oord and J. Wiersma, 13–63 (Gompel en Svacina, 2023).

32 Lejeune, *On Diary*, 34.

33 *Dagboek van broeder Wouter Jacobsz 1572–1579. Het beleg van Amsterdam 1572–1578. De nasleep, 1578–1579. Verslag van een ooggetuige.* Bewerkt, hertaald en geannoteerd door H. de Kruif, (Aspekt, 2008).

34 See, for example, the digital platform which collects personal stories about the pandemic in Amsterdam "Corona in de stad/Corona in the City": https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/56256/corona-in-de-stad.

The growing emphasis on space, place and mobility in research has been fuelled by today's advances in location-tracking technologies and mobility mapping. Digital tools have also inspired various projects which study cities through diaries in their broadest sense—encompassing paper diaries, digital diaries, tweets and vlogs. While many of these projects, such as Amsterdam RealTime, focus on contemporary diaries, others work with historical diaries from archival collections, such as the Amsterdam Diaries Time Machine. These projects demonstrate the potential of combining diary studies with digital humanities methods to examine diverse aspects of urban life, past and present.

Overall, integrating diary studies and urban history can provide valuable insights into the multifaceted aspects of urban life: the city as a space of mobility and a setting for social and cultural life, the city's topography, its interaction with national and global developments, the embodied and sensory experiences of the city and the relationship between identity and a sense of "place," understood here as a space given meaning, and inscribed with qualities, or imbued with emotions. This last aspect, the place-bound identity, is particularly relevant for this volume and will be explored in more detail in the following section.

The Self and the City: Identity and Belonging

Earlier, we noted that Dutch research on nineteenth-century egodocuments has challenged assumptions on the causal link between individualization and autobiographical practices, including the diary. Nevertheless, the correlation between both phenomena still stands, as it is generally agreed that diaries, memoirs and other forms of self-narration often express or imply an understanding of one's self and identity.

Some diarists are highly self-reflexive and record experiences and actions in dialogue with one's self, pondering questions with regard to their identity: Who am I and where do I belong? Diarists who are less inclined to self-examination still reveal a sense of self—albeit indirectly—through their journaling practice; showing consistency, or lack thereof, in a particular writing style and a selection of thoughts and events worth mentioning. Maybe for all, the act of diary keeping helps them make sense of themselves and the world around them. The personal records they have left behind will, in turn, offer us insight into their sense of self and identity within an urban setting.

The notion of identity is often used interchangeably with "self," "ego" and "I," which all relate to an understanding of who a person is. While self and identity appear to be related but different, it seems fruitless to make clear-cut conceptual distinctions, because most studies highlight similar defining facets.[35] Firstly, just as identity, the self has long been considered that part of a person which remains continuous over the course of time—whether referring to character, consciousness or a maturing personality. In the past few decades, many life writing scholars have come to agree that autobiographical writing does not merely express a sense of self and identity, it forms a constituent part of identity making. Even more so, rather than self-expressions, acts of writing are regarded as identity constructions or "performances" of the self.

Perhaps, this applies especially to autobiographies and memoirs which (re-)construct a life, retrospectively, in a coherent narrative form. Even if diaries are more immediate and fragmented writings with lack of closure, they disclose, constitute and shape a self-individuality. Diary keeping can be an ongoing process of identity formation, especially in those diaries that are kept over an extended period of time. For diarists who have lived their whole life in Amsterdam, the city appears to be a constant companion in the sense of an everyday "felt" surrounding which is entirely familiar. For people who have moved to Amsterdam in search of opportunities for study or work, their arrival in the city often marks a new chapter in their lives. All diaries, nonetheless, make manifest how the authors perform an identity by attaching meaning to specific places, such as visits to the Concert Hall or the Rijksmuseum. Simultaneously, they show that the practice of writing aids them in affirming their place in a certain area of the city, whether Noord, Jordaan or the Hoofddorpplein area, and make it their own.

Secondly, scholars tend to regard both self and identity as multiple, intersectional and relational. Identities relating to religion, class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality can coexist simultaneously in one person, or overlap and interconnect. Additionally, the role of place, whether a city, region or broader space, is recognized as integral to shaping both the self and identity. The multiplicity of identities can be connected to the notion of identity as intersectional, which helps understand that identifying as a woman, Dutch, Jewish and an Amsterdammer, are not distinctly different dimensions, but

35 See, for instance, the following chapters on "Identity" and "Self" by Michael Quante and Annette Dufner, "Identity," in *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, ed. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (De Gruyter, 2019), 305–9; Michael Quante and Annette Dufner, "The 'Self,'" in *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, ed. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (De Gruyter, 2019), 390–97.

intersect in being a Dutch-Jewish Amsterdam woman. Relevant here, too, is identity as relational, which points to someone's social connections to other people, and to feelings of belonging. Relationality gives expression to the idea that identity is constituted in relation to "others," whether as different or as similar, in the sense of identification with a social, cultural or religious group, a neighbourhood or a city. In the context of urban spaces, it's worth giving consideration to the ways in which identities are shaped by the city, and vice versa, how the city gives shape to identities.

In this context, the notion of urban identity merits attention. It is widely used in urban studies research, but different meanings are attached to it. Scholars have identified at least three different meanings.[36] Firstly, the "identity of urban" refers to the identity of a city—its historical-cultural characteristics and the physical urban fabric—which distinguishes it from other cities. Secondly, "identity in urban" relates to the identity of the people who live in the urban space of a city and may, or may not, perceive themselves as residents who belong to the city. Thirdly, "identity for urban" relates to city branding and marketing campaigns which promote a particular image of the place for commercial purposes. Although it is obvious that the second meaning is the most important to our volume, the first and third are relevant too, as they can facilitate a better comprehension of the ways individuals relate to prevailing images of Amsterdam.

This volume engages with multiple questions relating to issues of "identity in urban" as they emerge in the context of the city of Amsterdam: Which ways do people express identifications and feelings of belonging to the place and what does Amsterdam mean to them? Do they understand themselves as Amsterdammers and refer to Amsterdam as "home," or do they express a sense of belonging indirectly, as, for instance, by using plural possessive pronouns to describe "our" streets and trams? What aspects of urban life are significant for their sense of belonging? Is it the city's history and its cultural heritage, the topography, the social and religious circles, or the art scene? How do authors position themselves vis-à-vis the city and "take up, inhabit, and speak through certain discourses" about Amsterdam that are available at the moment of writing?[37]

There is a longstanding and rich scholarship on Amsterdam as a historical, cultural and global city, which has extensively studied its identity and

36 Fitrawan Umar, Haryo Winarso and Iwan Kustiwan, "Urban Identity and Planning: Conceptual Study on Identity of Urban: Identity in Urban and Identity for Urban," *Spatium* 51 (2024): 11–20.

37 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* (2010), 215.

image—from within and outside. Giving close consideration to diaries as historical sources can help explore the different ways people have expressed identifications with the urban space, and engage, consciously or not, with prevailing images and discourses about Amsterdam as the powerful port town of the Dutch East India Company, the hometown of old Masters like Rembrandt and the liberal city of freedom and tolerance which is home to a great diversity of cultures. This last image is clearly present in Russell Shorto's book *Amsterdam: A History of the Most Liberal City in the World* (2013).[38] It describes the Dutch capital as the birthplace of individual freedom, which continues to be a place of liberty and the centre of tolerance towards prostitution, drug use, gay marriage and euthanasia.

This long dominant image of an open, inclusive and radically free Amsterdam has been called into question in the twenty-first century. The heated Dutch debate about the "failed" multicultural society and the murder of film-maker Theo van Gogh by a radical Muslim in Amsterdam in 2004, fairly soon after 9/11, contributed to a—real or perceived—threat to the freedom of speech. Internationally, the changing atmosphere in Amsterdam was regarded "at the forefront of transformations that were felt to be underway or imminent in European society at large."[39] On top of that, the rapidly increasing globalization, gentrification and mass tourism, which went hand in hand with a return to local customs and traditions, put Amsterdam under pressure.

In the last couple of years, Amsterdam has been further challenged. One struggle is to come to terms with its complex legacies of colonialism and slavery in the "golden age," a term that has become controversial. In 2018, Femke Halsema, the newly appointed mayor and former leader of GroenLinks, a left-wing green political party, observed a worrying decline in tolerance towards minorities. Yet, she affirmed that "the essence of Amsterdam is the promise of freedom."[40] Her deliberate emphasis on the word "promise" signals a subtle but significant shift in discourse, suggesting that freedom in Amsterdam is not a guaranteed reality, but rather an ongoing aspiration and commitment. She repeated that message in October 2024, in her speech marking the start of the city's celebrations

38 Russell Shorto, *Amsterdam: A History of the World's Most Liberal City* (Doubleday, 2013).

39 Marco de Waard, "Amsterdam and the Global Imaginary," in *Imagining Global Amsterdam*, ed. Marco de Waard (Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 12.

40 Femke Halsema, inaugural speech, 12 July 2018, https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/college/burgemeester/speeches/beediging/.

of its 750th anniversary.[41] Diversity is key to the official festivities which mark "750 years of history, innovation and diversity" and seek "to build connections within the multicultural and diverse communities." In this context, Halsema insists on the importance of stories:

> By sharing the stories of our origins, we discover new ways to foster solidarity and togetherness, allowing us to envision the future of our city with fresh eyes. Only when all past stories are told can we dream of centuries to come.[42]

Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity responds to this call from a scholarly point of view, by drawing attention to new stories and helping understand how to read and interpret them in the light of the city's history. For a city like Amsterdam, with a long history of migration, the stories of migrants especially need to be (re)discovered and shared. As has been pointed out, these sources are still underrepresented in the collections of archives and, relatedly, in research. This volume presents new sources and materials and shows that migrant memoirs and diaries are particularly valuable sources for studying the city, as they tend to articulate explicit reflections on the newly inhabited urban space and reflect on their place experiences and attachment to the city.

This is evidently the case in the memoirs of an "Amsterdam childhood" by Surinamese-Jewish Ruud Beeldsnijder (Grantsaan), as well as in the diary of Turkish artist Işık Tüzüner (Özkan Hoeijmakers and Van Hasselt), and the conversation with autobiographer Alejandra Ortiz, a trans migrant woman of Mexican descent (Castillo Soto). They all give expression to their emotional involvement in the city and articulate a sense of belonging. These and other cases illustrate that the city enables the construction of a local identity, in between national, cultural and diasporic belongings. Even if the discourse around Amsterdam as a liberal city has been changing, Tüzüner and Ortiz emphasize their experiences of freedom in Amsterdam in contrast to their countries of birth.

Amsterdam, in their writings, appears as a site of multiple, intersecting cultures. Mary Louise Pratt's notion of "contact zones" is helpful for

41 Femke Halsema, "Halsema in toespraak over 750e jaar Amsterdam: "Samen zorgen dat de stad straalt,'" *AT5*, 27 October 2024, https://www.at5.nl/nieuws/229237/halsema-in-toespraak-over-750e-jaar-amsterdam-samen-zorgen-dat-de-stad-straalt.

42 "Amsterdam Celebrates 750 Years of History, Innovation and Diversity," https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/college/burgemeester/persberichten/amsterdam-celebrates-750-years-history/.

identifying the meaning they attach to places, where diverse people meet, interact and sometimes clash.[43] Educational institutes, for instance, come into view as such contact zones. Beeldsnijder, for instance, attended the prestigious Barlaeus Gymnasium in the rich and elitist South area, where he got acquainted with pupils from various backgrounds. As he recalls in his memoirs, he himself, as a coloured boy, never experienced any discrimination, but a classmate from the Jordaan area was bullied for his working-class background.

By granting access to such individual experiences, diaries may serve as a useful nuance to mainstream narratives, even if they showcase exceptional life histories which cannot be held representative for an entire group. They can, in any case, counter the generalizations and stereotypical pigeonholing with regard to identities. This can be further illustrated by the diaries of the first wave of "repatriates" from Indonesia, after the Second World War, which document their arrival in the Dutch capital. While these sources certainly record the bureaucratic challenges and long struggles to settle down, they simultaneously show the excitement and the opportunities to take agency and build a new life in Amsterdam.

Diaries and other life writing genres furthermore allow insight into the social dynamics of the city's educational settings, which provide people with opportunities for growth and identity development. Interestingly, the letters and travel journal of Amsterdam-born Els Borst —née Eilers— describe her school experiences at the same Barlaeus Gymnasium in the 1940s, a few years later than Beeldsnijder. These sources reveal that she, as a girl of modest descent, was able to climb up the social ladder by moving into the circles of doctors and professors through school friends. Another diarist, the skipper Doorneveld, attended evening courses at the esteemed Vossius Gymnasium, in order to satisfy his hunger for historical knowledge of the city and give more depth to his identity as an Amsterdammer.

Besides educational institutions, cultural centres can equally play a crucial role in identity formation. For instance, the nineteenth-century diary of Netje Asser, featuring in Buijs's contribution, describes—partly in French—her visits to the Concert Hall on Herengracht and the City Theatre close to Leidseplein. Thereby, she gives shape to her identity as a cultured young woman belonging to an assimilated, upper-class Jewish family moving in respectable social circles. In the twenty-first century, Amsterdam's cultural scene has hugely expanded and now has centres which facilitate the sharing of personal stories. One example is Mezrab, the House

43 Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* (1991), 33–40.

of Stories, founded by two Iranian refugees who introduced their storytelling tradition in Amsterdam in 2004. As Gülbudak argues, many visitors, whether established local residents or newcomers, experience this cultural centre as a "home." It serves as a welcoming "third place"—an informal gathering space outside of the home or workplace—fostering community and connection. This case exemplifies the more general notion that personal storytelling, in one way or another, has been central to processes of identity formation, and has also given form to the city's urban fabric, thus contributing to Amsterdam's history, for the present and the future.

The diary and life writing genres, in all their different configurations, provide rich sources for studying modes of identification with, and belonging to the city. The contributions to this volume show that each life story opens up a different perspective on life in Amsterdam; people share the public space of the city and some cross paths, but everyone has their own lifestyle and life world, neighbourhood, routes and routines, social circles, and connections to the city's historical layers and legacies. Besides, all people narrate about the everyday city in different stages of their life, ranging from young adults to grown-ups and retired residents. Taken together, this collection of stories builds up into a kaleidoscopic view on Amsterdam, highlighting various facets of urban life.

Structure and Thematics

Building on the thematic threads and discussions outlined above, this volume is structured into five sections: "Coming of Age," "Belonging," "Routes and Routines," "Digital Lives" and a "Creative Section." By focusing on recurring themes and modes of life writing in relation to the city, rather than following a strict chronology, the book spans from the eighteenth century—when egodocuments began to proliferate exponentially—to the present day.

The first section, "Coming of Age," brings together contributions which discuss the theme of adolescence and self-discovery, pivotal to diary writing. The theme is explored through diverse perspectives, beginning with Anne Frank's famous diary. Diederik Oostdijk sheds a fresh perspective on her life and work by focusing on the seventy-four images Anne Frank affixed to her walls. This visual record served as a medium for imagination and self-expression in her confined environment—and, as Oostdijk uncovers, it is simultaneously connected to the lives of other people, in Amsterdam and beyond.

Whereas Anne Frank experienced wartime Amsterdam from her isolated position in hiding, Els Borst (1932–2014) left the city during the Hunger Winter to stay in the rural area of Noord-Holland. Nele Beyens examines the coming-of-age experiences of Els Borst—born as Els Eilers—who would later become minister of health. In Borst's letters from the countryside and later travel journals, Amsterdam comes into view as her main reference point, showing how place and identity are intertwined.

David Grantsaan opens up a wider geography in his study of the childhood memoir of historian Ruud Beeldsnijder (1927–2004), a second-generation immigrant of Afro- and Jewish-Surinamese descent. Grantsaan analyses his subject's multiple belongings, with a particular focus on Beeldsnijder's attachment to Amsterdam, which reveals itself in nostalgic memories of the urban area in which he grew up, and from where he explored the city, through walking and mapping its infrastructure.

The contributions in the second section, "Belonging," explore how residents, both long-time and newcomers, navigate their sense of belonging to Amsterdam. Polly North explores Jane Hoyake's wartime diaries (1939–45) which offer a fragmented yet intimate view of a city under siege and first and foremost record Hoyake's spiritual struggles during the German occupation. North compares the relatively unknown Hoyake to Wittgenstein and Sontag, with regards to her use of the diary as a tool for self-transformation.

The contribution of Eveline Buchheim and Ernestine Hoegen uncovers the experiences of several diarists arriving in Amsterdam from Indonesia shortly after the end of the Second World War in Southeast Asia. Among them were Thérèse Geerlofs and Piet Oomes, both nineteen, and young widow Toos Avis. All three were part of the first wave of post-war migrants from the former colony of the Netherlands. Their diaries reflect both the challenges and opportunities they encountered in a foreign city, with optimism prevailing in their narratives despite the difficulties they faced.

Irem Burcu Özkan Hoeijmakers and Laura van Hasselt analyse the multilingual diaries of Turkish-born artist Işık Tüzüner (b. 1954), who has lived in Amsterdam since 1975. Tüzüner's writings are colourful in more than one sense, reflecting her evolving identity as a cosmopolitan artist in Amsterdam. While she cherishes her Turkish heritage, she identifies first and foremost as an Amsterdammer. Her diaries reveal how the city's artistic and liberal atmosphere has shaped her sense of belonging.

The third section, "Routes and Routines," delves more deeply into the spatial dimensions of everyday life in Amsterdam, showing how daily patterns and movements reveal broader social and cultural dynamics. Daan C. Jansen's contribution offers a novel perspective by examining

human–animal interactions in eighteenth-century Amsterdam through legal depositions, which reveal how dogs, like humans, influenced urban routines and conflicts. His work highlights the role of non-human actors in shaping city life.

Peter Buijs focuses on the nineteenth-century diaries of two Jewish women, Netje Asser (1807–1893) and Hanna da Costa-Belmonte (1800–1867). Buijs argues that the relatively late introduction of intimate Jewish diaries was probably related to the cultural isolation in which many Dutch Jews lived for a long time. It is therefore not surprising to find the first of such diaries, like those of Netje and Hanna, in upper-class social circles that were integrated and actively taking part in Amsterdam's international cultural life. Netje's diary details her cultural engagements in the city, while Hanna's centres around family life and the Christian faith to which she converted, offering insights into the diverse experiences of urban life.

Laura van Hasselt's contribution shifts the focus to the twentieth century, with the diary of Amsterdam skipper Adriaan Doorneveld (1924–2003). These meticulous records, spanning nearly six decades, illustrate how routine itself can be a driving force behind diary keeping. Doorneveld's diary reveals a constantly evolving relationship with Amsterdam, from a city of water, to a city of streets and parks, to a city of history and museums. Notably, the selective nature of his entries, showing hardly any emotion, reminds us that diaries are curated narratives, shaped by what is recorded and what is left unsaid.

The fourth section, "Digital Lives," examines how the advent of digital technology and social media has transformed practices of life writing and introduces innovative projects and infrastructures on Amsterdam diaries. Julie Rak's contribution highlights the continued relevance of paper journaling in a digital world, introducing the concept of the "post-digital" to explain the interplay between analogue and digital diaries. Amsterdam emerges as a prominent focus for analogue travel journals, which are shared extensively on social media. Abby Sy, an Instagram influencer and travel journal designer, exemplifies the "post-digital" construction of identity, where online platforms foster liberal ideals of self-improvement, while analogue creativity resists and redefines those same digital influences.

Several Amsterdam-based projects have made use of GPS tracking and other digital technologies in order to collectively map the location data in the everyday lives of the inhabitants of a city. Helga Lenart-Cheng discusses new practices of what she calls "personal story mapping" through projects like Amsterdam RealTime and the Amsterdam Diaries Time Machine. While the use of tracking technologies raises concerns, for instance about

surveillance, they also offer potential for reimagining and transforming urban geographies.

The final chapter of this section by Leon van Wissen, Janna Aerts, Boudewijn Koopmans and Ingeborg Verheul, elaborates on the Amsterdam Diaries Time Machine. This project demonstrates how historical diaries held in archives can be approached with digital methods and tools in order to map urban lives. With this small-scale pilot study of six female diarists in Amsterdam during the Second World War, they aim to explore the potential and limits of digital humanities for diary research focused on urban history.

The volume concludes with a Creative Section, which challenges rigid boundaries between scholarly analysis and creative storytelling. The contributions in this section aim to invite further discussion and reflection on the potential of creative approaches in exploring life writing and the city, while also advancing academic debates on these issues.

The first two contributions by Pip Weytingh epitomize this blending of the academic and the creative. In the first piece, Weytingh adopts an unconventional narrative voice, presenting Amsterdam through the perspective of one of its most iconic features: a bike. In the second contribution, Weytingh offers a critical reflection on the differences between academic and creative writing. She argues that creative writing's openness and ambiguity complement academic writing's aim to resolve ambiguities and assert factual clarity, with both forms shaped by subjectivity.

In her visual essay on the work of Amsterdam artist Fabrice Hünd (1961–2021), Cornelia Doornekamp discusses four mega-mosaics (*Mega-mozaïeken*) he created between 2006 and 2021 on buildings throughout the city. She investigates their connection to Amsterdam's history and its residents, as well as the artist's personal relationship with the city. For his mosaics, Fabrice used not only material he himself found in the streets and the city's waste, but also offered to him by residents. The totality of the works and their materials amount to a self-portrait of the artist and his artistic imagination, as well as of his view of the city.

Ceren Gülbudak sheds light on contemporary Amsterdam through urban storytelling, focusing on Mezrab, the "House of Stories" in the city's east. Founded in 2004 by Iranian refugee Sahand Sahebdivani, Mezrab hosts storytelling evenings that draw a diverse, migrant-rich audience. For Gülbudak and many others, it serves as a home in Amsterdam. Her essay combines personal experience and academic insight to explore how storytelling fosters community-building and local belonging.

The contribution of María Auxiliadora Castillo Soto examines in more depth issues of migration, places and urban belonging in twenty-first-century

Amsterdam. Her conversation with life writing author Alejandra Ortiz (b. 1983) offers readers an opportunity to look at Amsterdam through the perspective of an undocumented, trans migrant woman from Mexico. Their walk and talk, centred around locations in the city that hold special significance for Ortiz, highlights how urban spaces can simultaneously provide refuge and arouse a sense of unsafety. Ortiz's desire to document the stories of marginalized groups reflects the need for diverse perspectives in understanding urban identities.

Finally, Edy Seriese's provocative piece critiques the Western-centric approach to archiving personal narratives, calling for a decolonization of archives and academic disciplines. Her reflection on the process of categorizing the Indisch Wetenschappelijk Instituut (Indies Scientific Institute, IWI) collection of oral histories reveals how archival practices can strip stories of their context, perpetuating colonial biases. Seriese calls to continue the collection of diverse personal stories by involving writers, storytellers and collectors.

Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity endorses this call, addressing colleagues and collaborators, as well as readers of this volume. The diaries and other life narratives presented here are, of course, only a fraction of the possible stories that could be told. We hope that the contributions in this volume will inspire further research and deepen discussions about diaries and life writing works as vital sources for urban history, within Amsterdam and far beyond.

Bibliography

Sources

Dagboek Toby Vos, 1944–63, EGO/65B, Aletta (nu ATRIA), instituut voor vrouwengeschiedenis, https://geheugen.delpher.nl/nl/geheugen/view?coll=ngvn&identifier=EVDO01%3AIIAV002_IAV001000031.

Dagboek van broeder Wouter Jacobsz 1572–1579. Het beleg van Amsterdam 1572–1578. De nasleep, 1578–1579. Verslag van een ooggetuige. Bewerkt, hertaald en geannoteerd door H. de Kruif, Aspekt, 2008.

Frank, Anne, Otto Frank and Mirjam Pressler. *Het Achterhuis: Anne Frank*. Prometheus, 2019.

Literature

"Amsterdam Celebrates 750 Years of History, Innovation and Diversity," https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/college/burgemeester/persberichten/amsterdam-celebrates-750-years-history/

Anne Frank House. "The Publication of the Diary." https://www.annefrank.org/en/anne-frank/diary/publication-diary/.

Baggerman, Arianne. "Lost Time: Temporal Discipline and Historical Awareness in Nineteenth Century Dutch Egodocuments." In *Controlling Time and Shaping the Self: Developments in Autobiographical Writing since the Sixteenth Century*, edited by Arianne Baggerman, Rudolf Dekker and Michael Mascuch, 455–77. Brill, 2011.

Baggerman, Arianne, and Rudolf Dekker. "Autobiografisch schrijven in Nederland: Ontwikkelingen van de zestiende eeuw tot begin negentiende eeuw." In *Egodocumenten van Nederlanders uit de zestiende tot begin Negentiende eeuw: Repertorium*, edited by Ruud Lindeman, Yvonne Scherf, Arianne Baggerman and Rudolf Dekker, 7–31. Panchaud, 2016.

Baggerman, Arianne, and Rudolf Dekker. "Jacques Presser, Egodocuments and the Personal Turn in Historiography." *European Journal of Life Writing* 7 (2018):90–111. https://doi.org/10.5463/ejlw.7.263.

Banerjee, Mita. "Life Writing." In *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, edited by Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, 336–341. De Gruyter, 2019.

Bosch, Mineke, Maria Grever and Martine Soeting. "Gender and Life-Writing Today—An Introduction." *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* 19, no. 3 (2016):291–299.

Boter, Babs. "'Zo net een ijsclubje gelopen, veerkrachtig en gelukkig.' Etty Hillesums ruimtelijke ervaringen van Amsterdam." In *Etty Hillesum over God en Lot*, edited by Klaas Smelik, Lidwien Bergen, Mary Clement, Paula Couto, Gerard van Oord and Joop Wiersma, 13–63 Gompel & Svacina, 2023.

Deutsch, Sarah. "Novels, Autobiographies, and Memoirs." In *Doing Spatial History*, edited by Riccardo Bavaj, 73–87. Routledge, 2022.

De Waard, Marco. "Amsterdam and the Global Imaginary." In *Imagining Global Amsterdam*, edited by Marco de Waard, 9–24. Amsterdam University Press, 2012.

Ehland, Christoph, and Pascal Fischer. "General Introduction." In *Resistance and the City: Negotiating Urban Identities: Race, Class and Gender*. Brill/Rodopi, 2018.

Fong, Ian. "Woolf, Virginia, *Mrs Dalloway*." In *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Urban Literary Studies*, edited by Jeremy Tambling, 1913–19. Palgrave, 2022.

Gay, Peter. *Education of the Senses*. Volume 1 of *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*. W. W. Norton, 1984.

Halsema, Femke. "Halsema in Toespraak over 750e Jaar Amsterdam: 'Samen Zorgen dat de Stad Straalt.'" *AT5*, 27 October 2024. https://www.at5.nl/nieuws/229237/halsema-in-toespraak-over–750e-jaar-amsterdam-samen-zorgen-dat-de-stad-straalt.

Halsema, Femke. "Inaugural Speech of 12 July 2018." https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/college/burgemeester/speeches/beediging/.

Henderson, Desirée. *How to Read a Diary: Critical Contexts and Interpretive Strategies for 21st-Century Readers*. Routledge, 2019.

Huisman, Marijke. *Publieke Levens: Autobiografieën op de Nederlandse boekenmarkt 1850–1918*. Walburg Pers, 2008.

Lejeune, Philippe. *On Diary*. Edited by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, translated by Kathy Durnin. University of Hawai'i Press, 2009.

Lindeman, Ruud, Yvonne Scherf, Arianne Baggerman and Rudolf Dekker, eds. *Egodocumenten van Nederlanders uit de zestiende tot begin negentiende eeuw: Repertorium*. Panchaud, 2016.

Lounsberry, Barbara. *Virginia Woolf's Modernist Path: Her Middle Diaries & the Diaries She Read*. University Press of Florida, 2019.

Moore, Ben. "The Flâneur." In *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Urban Literary Studies*, edited by Jeremy Tambling, 661–66. Palgrave, 2022.

Quante, Michael, and Annette Dufner. "Identity." In *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, edited by Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, 305–9. De Gruyter, 2019.

Quante, Michael, and Michael Kühler. "The 'Self.'" In *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, edited by Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, 390–97. De Gruyter, 2019.

Pratt, Mary Louise. "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Profession* (1991): 33–40.

Rak, Julie, and Anna Poletti. *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2014.

Ruggiu, François-Joseph, ed. *The Uses of First Person Writings: Africa, America, Asia, Europe*. Peter Lang, 2013.

Schahadat, Schamma. "Diary." In *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, edited by Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, 548–49. De Gruyter, 2019.

Schaser, Angelika. "Gender." In *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, edited by Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, 287–92. De Gruyter, 2019.

Seamon, David. *Life Takes Place: Phenomenology, Lifeworlds and Placemaking*. Routledge, 2018.

Shorto, Russell. *Amsterdam: A History of the World's Most Liberal City*. Doubleday, 2013.

Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2nd ed. University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography Now: An Updated Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 3rd ed. University of Minnesota Press, 2024.

Tambling, Jeremy. "Benjamin, Walter: *Berlin Childhood around 1900*." In *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Urban Literary Studies*, edited by Jeremy Tambling, 200–210. Palgrave, 2022.

Tambling, Jeremy, "Walter Benjamin." In *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Urban Literary Studies*, edited by Jeremy Tambling, 191–93. Palgrave, 2022.

Tamboukou, Maria. "Reassembling Documents of Life in the Archive." *European Journal of Life Writing* 6 (2017): 101–34. https://ejlw.eu/article/view/31482/28830.

Umar, Fitrawan, Haryo Winarso and Iwan Kustiwan. "Urban Identity and Planning: Conceptual Study on Identity of Urban Identity in Urban and Identity for Urban." *Spatium* 51 (2024):11–20.

Vermeer, Leonieke. "Stretching the Archives: Ego-documents and Life Writing Research in the Netherlands: State of the Art." *BMGN—Low Countries Historical Review* 135, no. 1 (2020): 31–69. https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.10784.

Vermeer, Leonieke. "Tiny Symbols Tell Big Stories: Naming and Concealing Masturbation in Diaries (1660–1940)." *European Journal of Life Writing* 6 (2017):101–134. https://ejlw.eu/article/view/31487.

About the Authors

Marleen Rensen is associate professor of modern European literature at the University of Amsterdam. She specializes in twentieth-century literature and life writing, with a particular focus on autobiographical and biofictional representations of artists' lives.

Leonieke Vermeer is assistant professor of modern history at the University of Groningen. Her research interests focus on diaries and life writing, especially in relation to the history of the body, health and illness.

I.

Coming of Age

DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-pt1

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

2. Her Visual Diary: How Anne Frank's Picture Walls Evoke the War Lives of Other Women from Amsterdam

Diederik Oostdijk

Abstract: *The Diary of Anne Frank* is the most famous and widely read diary in the world, with over thirty million copies sold. Less well known than the written diary is the visual record Anne Frank kept in her hiding place. She attached seventy-four images to the walls of the secret annex, fifty-two of which remain visible today at the Anne Frank House. This chapter discusses what these images reveal about her development as a teenager and how they evoke a world beyond the secret annex. It also suggests that they reflect the wartime experiences of other women in Amsterdam. Anne Frank's picture walls constitute a visual diary, revealing a remarkable connectedness to people she never met but to whom she was inextricably linked.

Keywords: World War II; self-representation; teenage identity; memory objects; life in hiding; cultural imagination

In addition to her world-famous diary, Anne Frank also left a visual record that reflects her predilections and personality. These are the seventy-four images which the teenage girl affixed to the walls of her room between 1942 and 1944, and sporadically elsewhere in the Secret Annex (Achterhuis). Her father took many of these postcards and magazine clippings, which Anne Frank had selected in previous years, to their hiding place. The family's helpers, especially Bep Voskuijl, also brought issues of magazines into the family's hiding place for Anne from which she cut out new ones to decorate her walls. Only fifty-two are still visible today, carefully preserved behind Plexiglas in the Anne Frank House to save them for posterity.[1]

1 Jos van der Lans and Herman Vuijsje, *Het Anne Frank Huis: Een Biografie* (Boom, 2010), 51.

Rensen, Marleen, Leonieke Vermeer, Laura van Hasselt and Ernestine Hoegen, eds. *Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity: Urban Lives*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2025.
DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-2

Unlike *The Diary of Anne Frank*, there is no apparent order or sequence to these images. There is no linear narrative, and we do not know exactly when she put them up either. The photographs, cartoons, and newspaper clippings were not completely randomly stuck to the walls, though, and it is likely that in Anne Frank's mind some images formed clusters of meanings. Still, it is not possible to discern an overarching structure of the entire collage, and we can only speculate what they meant to her. It is ironically the absence of a well-defined storyline that makes these images so intriguing to me, and presumably to others as well. The millions of visitors who have stared at these pictures in the past and the millions that will gaze at them in the future can only do so with dim comprehension. They are puzzle pieces without the ultimate satisfaction of ever solving the puzzle.

What do they reflect about World War II and about the Jewish girl from Amsterdam who died so unceremoniously and tragically at Bergen-Belsen? This is a question that curators at the Anne Frank House also pondered when they mounted a small, temporary exhibit at the museum that opened on 3 July 2021. With panels depicting how she dreamt of film stars, royalty, art and nature, they present Anne Frank's picture wall as an embodiment of the girl's vicarious escape from her cramped hiding place. This is an understandable way of looking at the pictures, as they can indeed be read as a reflection of "Anne's life, her dreams, and her changing interests during life," as the press release of the exhibit put it.[2] In this sense, Anne's picture walls can be considered an "egodocument," a term coined by Jacques Presser, the Amsterdam historian and one-time teacher of Anne. After all, the picture wall is also a text "in which an ego intentionally or unintentionally discloses, or hides itself," as Presser defined the term.[3]

The picture wall can therefore be interpreted as a visual companion piece to the diary, a visual diary even. Less eloquent and narrative perhaps but just as episodic and even more elusive, the images that Anne affixed to her walls simultaneously disclose and veil something about her changing character. Anne Frank dreamed, for instance, of going to Hollywood. This is apparent from many magazine clippings in her room featuring American movie stars, but also from a short story, "Dreams of Movie Stardom," which she wrote in the Secret Annex. The story describes how the narrator, like Anne a girl

2 Anne Frank House, "A Room Full of Dreams," 1 July 2021, https://www.annefrank.org/en/about-us/news-and-press/news/2021/7/1/room-full-dreams/.

3 Jacques Presser, "Clio Kijk door het Sleutelgat," in *Uit het Werk van J. Presser*, ed. M. C. Brands et al. (Athenaeum, Polak & Van Gennep, 1969), 286, as translated and cited by Rudolf Dekker, *Egodocuments and History: Autobiographical Writing in Its Social Context since the Middle Ages* (Uitgeverij Verloren, 2002), 7.

from Amsterdam, starts corresponding with the starlet Priscilla Lane who subsequently asks her to stay with the actress's family in California. In her wild imagination, Anne accepts the fanciful invitation, and even goes to a movie audition, only to come to the realization that the life of a Hollywood actress is not for her: "as for dreams of movie stardom, I was cured," Anne concludes.[4]

The exhibit at the Anne Frank House allows us to see that Anne's process of putting images on her walls shares some similarities with the way millions of young people nowadays use social media, ranging from Facebook, Instagram, and Reddit to TikTok. On these digital platforms, users put up images of themselves and of other people, places and things as a reflection of their personality. The "I" is defined from the outside to the inside. How does the world see me when I post an image of Instagram or Facebook, or put up a video on TikTok? How does the outside world validate the personality of myself that I project unto it? Except for the seven other people hiding in the Secret Annex, however, the outside world could not see how Anne used her picture walls to eke out a personality for herself.

Yet the very nature of these social media platforms allows users to update or change that projected image of the self constantly, by adding new images and replacing others, is akin to what Anne did. She put up fresh images throughout her stay at Prinsengracht 263, sometimes literally covering up older ones. A most telling example, which the art historian Alexander Nemerov has detailed, is how she pasted a close-up of Jesus Christ's face of Michelangelo's *Pietà* over a photograph of Hollywood stars Priscilla and Rosemary Lane on one of the bedroom walls.[5] This literal palimpsest—one of several—was discovered during the renovation process of the walls decades after Anne Frank stuck these images to her wall.

Replacing an image of the Lane sisters with Michelangelo's *Pietà* shows how Anne Frank was developing from a movie star–struck girl to a young woman with a maturer and more sophisticated taste. Half a year after writing "Dreams of Movie Stardom," on 8 May 1944, Anne wrote in her diary that she intended to go to London or Paris after the war to study languages or art history.[6] This "change of heart" also manifested itself elsewhere on Anne's picture wall.[7] She covered a childish cartoon with Leonardo da Vinci's

4 Anne Frank, *The Works of Anne Frank* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 316.

5 Alexander Nemerov, *Wartime Kiss: Visions of the Moment in the 1940s* (Princeton University Press, 2010), 116–18.

6 Anne Frank, *The Collected Works* (Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019), 178.

7 Nemerov, *Wartime Kiss*, 116.

likeness, for instance, and also added a reproduction of a self-portrait by Rembrandt to her wall. A reproduction of a landscape originally by Meindert Hobbema hanging in the Rijksmuseum also began to appear on her wall.

However fascinating it is to read the changing images in Anne Frank's room as a manifestation of her developing character, the picture wall is so much more than only that. In this chapter, I want to show how Anne Frank's picture walls not only reflect her changing personality during her period in hiding, but that the images also evoke the lives of other women in Amsterdam. Although she never personally met the people who produced the images or were depicted on them, she was nevertheless connected to them, however faintly. Take the Rembrandt image, for instance. He was buried in Westerkerk, a church located a stone's throw away from where she was hiding. The original of the reproduced self-portrait, *An Elderly Man as Saint Paul* (1659), which Anne selected to be pinned to her wall, also went into hiding during World War II. Like other precious paintings at the National Gallery, it was taken from its familiar location on London's Trafalgar Square days before Germany started the war. The museum's paintings were initially dispersed among several country houses, but when that became too dangerous because of the Blitz, they were sent deep into cavernous caves of an abandoned quarry in Wales.[8]

Hobbema's painting *A Watermill* (1664), whose reproduction Anne also affixed to her wall, suffered a similar fate. It also went into hiding, in an art bunker in the Dutch dunes, along with many other paintings from the Rijksmuseum. At the end of their lives, in the seventeenth century, Rembrandt and Hobbema lived opposite each other on the Rozengracht, less than half a mile from where Anne and her family were hiding. While Rembrandt was buried inside Westerkerk, Hobbema was buried in the churchyard just outside of the church. That burial ground has long since been cleared, and Hobbema's bones were taken elsewhere, along with those of thousands of other anonymous Amsterdam burghers. Yet the physical connection between Hobbema's initial burial place and Anne Frank remains. The millions of people who have lined up to see Anne Frank's secret hiding place do so at the approximate place where Hobbema was buried. So far removed from Anne Frank in terms of time, these Amsterdam painters—Rembrandt and Hobbema—and the paintings which Anne admired are nevertheless closely connected to her in terms of space.

There are other, more direct, serendipitous connections between Anne Frank and the creators of the images and those depicted on her picture

8 Suzanne Bosman, *The National Gallery in Wartime* (The National Gallery, 2008), 81.

walls. The most wondrous example is a reproduction of a black-and-white photograph taken by the Amsterdam-based Jewish photographer Maria Austria. It is a medium shot of a blond girl sucking her thumb and looking far off into the distance, which was published in the September 1941 issue of *Libelle*, a Dutch women's magazine. Curiously, Austria detected this image herself when she visited Prinsengracht 263 in November 1954. Austria was asked to take photographs of the abandoned location for the screenwriters and director of the Broadway play based on *The Diary of Anne Frank* which was being produced at the time. The run-down office space of Otto Frank's Opekta firm—now the Anne Frank House—was scheduled to be demolished, as were the adjacent canal houses on the corner next to Westerkerk. While going through the empty rooms to document the place, Austria found—in Anne's room—her own photograph affixed to a wall. Did she see it immediately after she set up her tripod and the artificial lighting in the darkening room? What was she thinking when she realized that the Jewish girl who was about to become world famous posthumously had cut out of a magazine a picture that Austria had taken?

Fig. 2.1. Maria Austria, Anne Frank's Picture Wall, 1954, © Maria Austria Institute, Amsterdam.

There are no immediate answers to these probing questions, although the contact sheets of the photographs that Austria took also form an "egodocument" following Presser's definition that I quoted earlier. Austria used artificial lighting for these images, and most likely a tripod on which her Rolleiflex camera rested. Each photograph deliberately or accidentally reveals something about her actions and artistic choices that day. Austria's contact sheets are a historic testimony whose relevance goes far beyond the usefulness of the pictures for the screenwriters Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett and director Garson Kanin. Some of the 166 photographs that Austria took show how Otto Frank—the sole survivor of the eight Jewish people who hid in the Secret Annex—leads Kanin, Goodrich and Hackett around the empty rooms. The photos show how captivated the American visitors are by the story they hear and the sights they behold. Yet it is the austere, monochromatic images that Austria took without any people present—of the famous bookcase blocking the secret door, of the narrow stairs, the elusive view on the Prinsengracht—that are most arresting and haunting. It is the absence of objects, the lack of people, that make us conjure up the unimaginable devastation of the Holocaust.

Fig. 2.2. H. Voûte (Maria Austria), *Marijke Delmonte*, *Libelle*, No. 39 (September 1941): 37.

Libelle magazine listed not Maria Austria but "H. Voûte" as the photographer, a result of the anti-Jewish measures that had been taken. Austria could no longer use her own name to sell her photographs, so she used a friend's name—Helena Voûte—instead. With her blond curls and pale complexion,

the photographed girl looks what the Nazi party called "Aryan." The picture seems to form a triarchy of light-haired girls high up on the wall against which Anne's writing desk was situated. It suggests that Anne was affected by the racialized beauty ideal of the time. Perhaps she even liked the looks of these girls because they looked the opposite of her dark-haired self. Yet the photographed girl, Marijke Delmonte, was also Jewish, just like the photographer, Maria Austria.

More remarkably, when Anne affixed the reproduction of Austria's photograph of Marijke on the wall of her hiding place, both of these Jewish women had also gone into hiding. Marijke, who had been born in Amsterdam in 1938, initially hid with her mother, Thérèse Joachimsthal (an acquaintance of Austria's), her father, the painter Koert Delmonte, and her younger sister, Saskia, who was born in 1942.[9] Later, Marijke was brought to a family in Lochem where she spent the rest of the war in hiding without her parents and sister.[10] Maria Austria hid at Vondelstraat 110, opposite the neo-Gothic church, only a mile and a half from Prinsengracht 263. Austria could glimpse Pierre Cuypers's church from the window of her hiding place and listen to its bells chiming. Meanwhile, Anne Frank found consolation in the sound of the Westerkerk until the bells of the carillon were taken away. Maria and Marijke never met Anne in Amsterdam and during their time on earth, but they are forever connected in the image that is still visible at the Anne Frank House.

If this is curious, it gets weirder. Unlike Anne Frank, Marijke survived the war, grew up just outside Amsterdam and eventually married the violinist Daniël Otten. His war years were equally traumatic, or more so. Born in the same year as Marijke, Daniël was orphaned by the age of six. Daniël's father—who was not Jewish—died before Daniël was born.[11] He was raised by a single mother, Annie Otten-Wolff, who was Jewish. Like Maria, Marijke and Anne, this mother and son also went into hiding, in the east of the country, after Daniël's grandfather was deported in front of his grandson's eyes. In 1944, the two were betrayed, and Annie Otten-Wolff was taken to Westerbork, and on to Bergen-Belsen, where she died of exhaustion that same year.[12] Daniël himself was saved. Daniël and Marijke Otten had never before visited the Anne Frank House,

9 Van der Lans and Vuijsje, *Het Anne Frank Huis*, 5; Friederike de Raat, "Alles wat met de oorlog te maken had, ging ik uit de weg," *NRC Handelsblad*, 2 May 2015.

10 Claudia Otten, email to author, 21 June 2025.

11 Daniël Otten, *Annie: Een Joodse weduwe en haar zoon in de greep van bezetting en vervolging* (Walburg Pers, 2012), 47.

12 Ibid., 145–46.

but did so decades later when they wanted to thank an employee of the museum who had done them a favour. They toured Prinsengracht 263 as millions of others had done by that time. On that first visit, it was Daniël who detected his wife's image as a young girl in Anne's bedroom. After their startling discovery, the befuddled couple descended the staircase to inform museum staff Marijke had identified herself on Anne Frank's picture wall.[13]

Marijke informed the staff that it had been Austria who had taken the photograph. She later also showed the staff at the Anne Frank House other photographs Austria had taken of Marijke when she was a toddler, which were collected in her so-called baby book, another visual diary that details the development of this Jewish girl in Amsterdam.[14] The dizzying discovery also rattled Marijke's husband, Daniël, who was in the process of revisiting his past after decades of ignoring his traumatic childhood. He learned that not only did his wife have an oblique shared history with Anne Frank, but his mother, Annie, did so as well. She had also been deported to Bergen-Belsen. It transpired that Daniël's mother left Westerbork on the same day as the Frank family did. Annie and Anne boarded the same train that left Westerbork at noon for the German death camp on 13 September 1944, the final train.[15] Reflecting that both his mother's and wife's lives intersected in this peculiar way with the girl who had by then become a symbol of the Holocaust, Daniël Otten concluded that these "poignant facts [...] reveal a wondrous interconnectedness" which aroused in him "a deep sense of connection" with Anne Frank.[16]

"How does one write about these moments?," Alexander Nemerov asks himself in *Wartime Kiss: Visions of the Moment in the 1940s*.[17] In his book, Nemerov seeks "to imagine a different way of writing history" from traditional practitioners in the field. His intuitive, poetic method allows for chance and wonder, which helps us to understand how Anne Frank's picture walls evoke wondrous meanings. Like the photographs and movie stills that Nemerov studies in that book, Anne Frank's pictures offer "a patchwork of glimpses" of an era that is just out of reach. "Yet in their ephemeral and random combination," Nemerov suggests, they "promise a recollection that is more sensuous, maybe more delightful, and more mysterious, than

13 Daniël Otten, *Annie & Jacques: Hartstochtelijke brieven van Annie Otten-Wolff aan Jacques Presser* (Walburg Pers, 2021), 185.

14 Ibid.

15 Otten, *Annie*, 144.

16 Author's translation of Otten, *Annie & Jacques*, 185.

17 Nemerov, *Wartime Kiss*, 3.

an official history."[18] Nemerov's method welcomes moments that bring "a lost moment and person directly into our view, so that what was and is coalesce in an eerie combination."[19] It is akin to what Johan Huizinga dubbed a historical sensation,[20] although Nemerov does not mention the Dutch historian when describing the effect on the person coming into contact with a historical artefact.

> In all cases there is no permanent coming to light and audibility, no sense of history as a preservation of the lost. Amid the gravelly crackling of the noise, whole worlds briefly appear, but the voices fall back to their corners, whorled in retreat. Moment to moment, the greeting of past and present is quick to come and go.[21]

Apt metaphors for this alternative kind of history writing can also be found in Anne Frank's diary. On 28 November 1942, she wrote how she found a new hobby: "using a good pair of binoculars to peek into the lighted rooms of the neighbours." This is strictly forbidden during the day, "but there's no harm when it's so dark," she reassures herself.[22] We zoom in on the pictures on her wall in the same way Anne focused her two telescopes. She increases her magnifying ability to stare at the people who are near the Secret Annex but whom she does not know personally, and who are paradoxically also far away and forever out of reach. Anne's peering through a binocular at illuminated houses is also how Austria used to stare into her Rolleiflex. That camera also has twin lenses, one for the photographer to see what the picture will look like, and one to arrest the picture forever. There is something voyeuristic about Anne's activity, but also in Austria's Rolleiflex as it allows you to take stealthily pictures. People who are photographed may never know when exactly their picture is taken.

Another surreptitious activity that Anne and the others in the Secret Annex engage in is lighting candles. She refers to candles four times in her diary, and each time the light soothes her. Staring at a candlelight on 3 March 1943, for instance, she imagines seeing her dead grandmother in the light.[23] Both the binocular and the candle allowed Anne to fleetingly illuminate what is dark, unseen and otherwise unavailable to her. So, what

18 Ibid., 2.
19 Ibid., 2.
20 Johan Huizinga, *Verzamelde Werken II* (Tjeenk Willink, H. D. & Zoon, 1948), 564.
21 Ibid., 3.
22 Frank, *The Collected Works*, 55.
23 Ibid., 130.

I am engaged in is a simultaneous process of illuminating what was dark and zooming in historically on the lives that hide beneath the images Anne Frank pinned to her walls.

Below the three blonde girls, we find in a rough horizontal line another set of three images. In central position, we find the Dutch actress Lily Bouwmeester pictured on the set of the movie *Ergens in Nederland* (Somewhere in the Netherlands) from 1940, flanked by two male figures. There was one other image on this horizontal line, as is visible in Austria's photograph, but that was removed, either by Anne Frank herself or someone else. It is a reminder that a complete "preservation of the lost" is not possible, as Nemerov argued.[24] The one on the left is only partially visible in Austria's photograph but represents the French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte in his younger years. The one on the right features a sculpture depicting Paracelsus, a sixteenth-century German-Swiss physician who is remembered for introducing chemistry in the field of medicine. This statue was created by the German sculptor Josef Thorak and stood and still stands in the "garden of Schloss Mirabell" of the Austrian city of Salzburg.[25]

If the three blonde girls represent the childhood innocence of the pre-war years, these three more disparate images are harbingers of Europe being conquered by another ruthless dictator. Before Hitler, Napoleon was the last ruler to take the continent by storm. Thorak was among "Hitler's supreme favourites," as historian Frederic Spotts has pointed out.[26] He helped reify the infamous Nazi ideology in concrete sculpture, espousing "comradeship, heroism, discipline, and submission," at the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games and in German cityscapes since Hitler's rise to power. "Hitler commissioned Albert Speer to design a studio for Thorak" during the war, and he also bought busts of Nietzsche and Hitler's own niece from the Nazi sculptor.[27] Thorak's *Paracelsus* statue is a less offensive example of Thorak's bombastic style. Yet it shows that Anne was not immune from the Nazi style's visual attraction.

Stuck in the middle of these forceful, historic men is Lily Bouwmeester. Anne Frank considered it worthwhile to cut out part of the caption from the magazine article right underneath the picture. It states that she was one of the few actresses who had been able to clinch an enduring place in the film business. Shortly after her breakthrough role in *Pygmalion*, the Amsterdam-born

24 Nemerov, *Wartime Kiss*, 3.

25 Jonathan Petropoulos, *The Faustian Bargain: The Art World in Nazi Germany* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 271.

26 Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (Abrams Press, 2002), 183.

27 Petropoulos, *The Faustian Bargain*, 265–66.

Fig. 2.3. Page from Lily Bouwmeester's Newspaper and Magazine Clipping Scrapbook featuring the same image and caption that Anne Frank cut out and put on her wall. Lily Bouwmeester Archive, Allard Pierson, Amsterdam, 20000084.001.

actress was wooed by representatives of Paramount Studios. Yet Bouwmeester and her husband, Cor van der Lugt Melsert, an actor and theatre director in Rotterdam, declined Hollywood's offer.[28] Released in April 1940, *Somewhere in the Netherlands* is a melancholic meditation on mobilizing the country for war. When Nazi Germany invaded the Netherlands a month later, the film was the first one to be prohibited. It is understandable why. While the movie is not overtly political and goes out of its way not to antagonize the neighbouring country, it is unabashedly patriotic.

The characters expect that the country will be overrun, and—like Anne Frank—they expect misery but believe that good will eventually prevail. *Somewhere in the Netherlands* is about being seduced by the dark side. Lily

28 "Lily Bouwmeester Niet Naar Hollywood," *Provinciale Overijsselsche en Zwolsche Courant*, 22 July 1937, 6.

Bouwmeester's character, Nellie van Loon, is wooed by Erik Detmar, played by Cruys Voorbergh, whose profile is also visible in the picture on Anne Frank's wall. Although Nellie is married to the lawyer Frans van Loon, she senses that her husband has set his heart on joining the Marines and has forgotten all about her. When her husband moves to the Marine base, Erik—a slick wannabe actor and director—makes a move on Nellie. She eventually comes to her senses regarding her real emotions at the end of the movie, in large part because of Frans's impassioned speech on why he wanted to join the Marines:

> Still, I want you to know one thing in case that somehow I can no longer be with you. Full of love and with full conviction, I have wagered my life to help you preserve your little world, our little world from before the war, devoid of all the dangers and bitterness of this time.[29]

It is these patriotic (and patriarchal) words that make Nellie do the right thing, and stay with her husband. Frans was played by Jan de Hartog, who was not really an actor but a writer who had helped the German-Jewish director Ludwig Berger on the movie script.

It is unlikely that Anne Frank ever got to see *Somewhere in the Netherlands*. It ran for less than a month at the City Theatre close to the Leidseplein, and you had to be eighteen to be allowed in. Moreover, the film was confiscated by the Gestapo after the German invasion less than a month later.[30] Like Marijke Otten's image and life story, the nostalgic tone of the film echoes Anne Frank's diary, though, and also the real and imagined lives of the actors and director of the movie. On 20 November 1942, Anne writes that she finally realized that no matter how much she loves her father and he loves her, he cannot "take the place of my entire little world of bygone days" in the Secret Annex.[31] Using the same exact words Frans voiced to Nellie, Anne Frank bemoans how her "little world" of before the war cannot be protected by the man in her life. It is shattered by the German invasion and their persecution of the Jews. At the time Anne Frank hung her picture of Lily Bouwmeester on the wall, the Dutch actress was pursued by the German film company UFA, which offered her a contract. Bouwmeester refused, and after featuring in two plays with De Hartog in 1940 and 1941, she opted out of acting altogether. After her Jewish husband went into

29 *Ergens in Nederland*, directed by Ludwig Berger (Filmex, 1940), author's translation.
30 "'Ergens in Nederland' opgedoken," *Het Vrije Volk*, 22 September 1945, 3.
31 Frank, *The Collected Works*, 664.

hiding, Bouwmeester moved to The Hague and hid two Jewish boys in her home. She was not part of the resistance: she was just resolved to do the right thing in real life.[32]

Bouwmeester's quiet heroics during the war contrasted sharply with the behaviour of her co-actor, Cruys Voorbergh. The actor continued to play and direct during the war, for instance, staging the opera *Faust*, with obvious approval from the Nazi occupiers.[33] After the war, the Honorary Council for Theatre suspended Voorbergh for two months, for his lack of showing "national and cultural responsibility," which implied that he let the Nazis use him for propaganda purposes. In a curious instance of life imitating art, the villain in *Somewhere in the Netherlands* was also a villain in real life.

The heroes in the movie were also heroes during the war. De Hartog published a novel in 1940, *Hollands Glorie*, an instantaneous bestseller, which Nazi authorities initially lauded for presenting a glorious Dutch-Aryan past. Yet when De Hartog refused to become a member of the Nederlandse Kultuurkamer (the Dutch Chamber of Culture, an organization set up by the German occupation forces in the Netherlands), he, too, had to go into hiding. Before ultimately fleeing to England, De Hartog wrote a play for Bouwmeester in the early months of 1943 from his hiding place in Amsterdam. *Het Hemelbed*, later staged as *Four-Poster* in England and the United States. It earned De Hartog a Tony award four years before the play based on Anne Frank's diary was staged on Broadway, to equal success. De Hartog's play was a declaration of love to the actress who was his wife in *Somewhere in the Netherlands*, Lily Bouwmeester, but who was married to someone else in real life.[34]

By zooming in on the pictures of Lily Bouwmeester and Marijke Delmonte on Anne Frank's picture wall, I have briefly illuminated the lives of four women from Amsterdam. Bouwmeester, Delmonte, and Maria Austria, who took Delmonte's picture, were never as famous as Anne Frank would become. Yet their war stories are equally moving. Both images on her wall open a window onto the world, evoking the lives of others who suffered in relative anonymity. The images on her walls shine a light on Anne Frank's changing predilections and character and her room full of dreams. The pictures also brought the world into her cramped little room. The war

32 Cor van der Lugt Melsert, letter to Flip, 24 September 1975, private archive, Martin Scheer, The Hague, The Netherlands.

33 "Cruys Voorbergh heeft groote plannen!," *Cinema & Theater* 22, no. 20 (22 May 1942), 12–13, 22.

34 Mel Gussow, "Jan de Hartog, 88, Author of His Own Life," *New York Times*, 24 September 2002, B7.

stories of Austria, Bouwmeester and Delmonte reflect on Anne Frank's life irrespective of the fact that she never met them during her short life. We often think that our identity is formed from the inside to the outside. It is not only formed by something that is inside us, however. Identity is also created, more mysteriously, in relation to others. For two years, Anne Frank was deprived of much human contact, except for interacting with a handful of people inside the Secret Annex and a few visitors who brought a bit of the large world into her little world. Her picture walls are not mere reflections of her dreams and ambitions. They are more essentially about the wondrous connectedness of all those who live in Amsterdam, who visit it, and who once lived in the city and visited it in the past.

Bibliography

Anne Frank House, "A Room Full of Dreams," 1 July 2021, https://www.annefrank.org/en/about-us/news-and-press/news/2021/7/1/room-full-dreams/.

Bosman, Suzanne. *The National Gallery in Wartime*. The National Gallery, 2008.

Bouwmeester, Lily. Archive, Allard Pierson, University of Amsterdam, 20000084.001.

"Cruys Voorbergh heeft groote plannen!" *Cinema & Theater* 22, no. 20 (22 May 1942): 12–13, 22.

Dekker, Rudolf. *Egodocuments and History: Autobiographical Writing in its Social Context since the Middle Ages*. Uitgeverij Verloren, 2002.

De Raat, Friederike. "Alles wat met de oorlog te maken had, ging ik uit de weg." *NRC Handelsblad*, 2 May 2015.

Ergens in Nederland. Directed by Ludwig Berger. Filmex, 1940.

"'Ergens in Nederland' opgedoken." *Het Vrije Volk*, 22 September 1945, 3.

Frank, Anne. *The Collected Works*. Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019.

Frank, Anne. *The Works of Anne Frank*. Doubleday, 1959.

Gussow, Mel. "Jan de Hartog, 88, Author of His Own Life." *New York Times*, 24 September 2002, B7.

Huizinga, Johan. *Verzamelde Werken II*. Tjeenk Willink, H. D. & Zoon, 1948.

"Lily Bouwmeester Niet Naar Hollywood." *Provinciale Overijsselsche en Zwolsche Courant*, 22 July 1937, 6.

Nemerov, Alexander. *Wartime Kiss: Visions of the Moment in the 1940s*. Princeton University Press, 2010.

Otten, Daniël. *Annie: Een Joodse Weduwe en haar Zoon in de Greep van Bezetting en Vervolging*. Walburg Pers, 2012.

Otten, Daniël. *Annie & Jacques: Hartstochtelijke brieven van Annie Otten-Wolff aan Jacques Presser*. Walburg Pers, 2021.

Petropoulos, Jonathan. *The Faustian Bargain: The Art World in Nazi Germany*. Oxford University Press, 2000.

Presser, Jacques. "Clio kijkt door het sleutelgat." *Uit het Werk van J. Presser*, edited by M. C. Brands et al. Athenaeum, Polak & Van Gennep, 1969.

Spotts, Frederic. *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*. Abrams Press, 2002.

Van der Lans, Jos, and Herman Vuijsje. *Het Anne Frank Huis: Een Biografie*. Boom, 2010.

Van der Lugt Melsert, Cor. Letter to Flip, 24 September 1975. Private archive, Martin Scheer, The Hague, The Netherlands.

About the Author

Diederik Oostdijk is professor of English literature at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and author of *Among the Nightmare Fighters: American Poets of World War II* (2011) and *Bells for America: Modernism, the Cold War, and the Netherlands Carillon in Arlington* (2019).

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

3. Coming of Age in Amsterdam: From Els Eilers to Els Borst

Nele Beyens

Abstract: This chapter explores the coming of age in 1940s Amsterdam of Els Eilers (best known as Els Borst, 1932–2014), examining how the city's sociocultural spaces shaped her identity and life choices. She grew up as an only child in a middle-class family in Rivierenbuurt but entered a more privileged world at the famous Barlaeus Gymnasium in Amsterdam Zuid. Apart from a small travel diary, she did not keep a diary. But, as a teenager, she did write many letters to the Langereis family in Anna Paulownapolder, with whom she lived during the Hunger Winter at the end of World War II. These letters reveal the contrast between her city life and rural experiences, highlighting how Amsterdam influenced her self-image and expectations.

Keywords: identity formation; Barlaeus Gymnasium; World War II; wartime letters; adolescence, female education

Each year on 4 May, the people of the Netherlands commemorate the victims of World War II with an elaborate ceremony at Dam Square in Amsterdam featuring speeches, music, wreath laying and two minutes of silence nationwide. One of the speakers in 1997 was Els Borst, who was then the Dutch minister of health. In her speech she explained how she—as a young girl living in Amsterdam during World War II—witnessed the deportation of her neighbours, as well as the execution of a group of Dutch resistance fighters. It was the first time she publicly testified about these facts, stating that what remained was "an overwhelming feeling of [...] powerlessness."[1]

1 Els Borst-Eilers, Speech for the National Commemoration at Dam Square in Amsterdam, 4 May 1997, The Hague, National Archives, Collection Els Borst, 341. This quote is translated by the author of this article, as are all quotes.

Rensen, Marleen, Leonieke Vermeer, Laura van Hasselt and Ernestine Hoegen, eds. *Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity: Urban Lives*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2025.
DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-3

At the time of the speech, Els Borst—born as Else Eilers—was sixty-five years old and a well-known national political figure. During her working life, she had made a name for herself in the Dutch healthcare system. Not only did she become medical director of one of the major Dutch academic hospitals, she also served as vice president of the Health Council of the Netherlands. Borst ended her career as minister of health, and is mainly known for her work in regard to the legislation of euthanasia.

In 2014 she was brutally murdered in her home by a mentally unstable man, but her name and fame resonate far into the twenty-first century.[2] In the spring of 2024, readers of the magazine *Arts en Auto*—a magazine aimed at Dutch health professionals—were asked which person had influenced Dutch healthcare the most. The resulting top ten of this inquiry contains several important historical figures such as the renowned premodern scientist and doctor Herman Boerhaave; the first female medical doctor of the Netherlands, Aletta Jacobs; and the Nobel Prize winner Willem Einthoven. Still, according to the readers of *Arts en Auto*, the most influential of all is Els Borst. She ended up on top of the list.[3]

Egodocuments Written by Els Borst-Eilers

Based on a set of various egodocuments, this chapter examines Els Borst-Eilers's coming of age in Amsterdam. What did it mean to grow up in Amsterdam during the 1940s, and how did the German occupation of this city influence that coming of age? The main sources for this chapter are a travel journal written in the spring of 1949, and a variety of letters written by Els Eilers during her youth. All of these documents are part of the private collection of the Borst family. Most of Borst's personal collection has been deposited at the National Archives in The Hague. However, documents of a more personal nature (such as personal letters, medical records and family memorabilia) are still in the possession of Borst's children. As the biographer of Els Borst, I was granted access to this private collection. Hopefully, in time the letters and the diary will be added to the collection at the National Archives.

Generally speaking, Els Borst-Eilers was not much of a diarist. It was only during her stay in Great Britain in 1949 that she kept a diary. Of course,

2 For more about the life of Els Borst-Eilers: Nele Beyens, *Els Borst. Medicus in de politiek* (Wereldbibliotheek, 2021).

3 Marte van Santen, "VVAA-top 100: 'Beste minister voor volksgezondheid ooit,'" *Arts & Auto*, 4 June 2024, https://www.artsenauto.nl/vvaatop100-elsborst/.

this stay was quite special. As a seventeen-year-old high school girl from Amsterdam, Els had been selected to attend the World Forum of Youth, an event organized by the United Nations (UN).[4] The forum brought together a total of twenty-six young people from thirteen different countries in Great Britain.[5] The idea behind this endeavour was promoting and keeping peace. By meeting each other, these young people from all over the world would come to create "a nucleus of enlightenment, friendship and understanding," the organization argued.[6] For two months, Els kept track of her itinerary, her dealings with her host families, her experiences at the British school she attended and the discussions and adventures with the other participants of the forum. In a small lined notebook, in the neat handwriting that she would keep her whole life, she wrote down her thoughts and the emotions she felt in regard to all that.

Apart from her diary, this study makes use of several letters. Most of these were written between 1945 and 1954 and are addressed to various members of the Langereis family, farmers living in Anna Paulownapolder in the province of North Holland in the Netherlands.[7] As will be explained later, this family played a very important role in Els's youth. Most of the letters to the Langereis family were written from her home, a flat on the third floor at Uiterwaardenstraat 332 in Amsterdam.

As argued by the Dutch historian Jacques Presser when he coined the term "egodocuments" in the late 1950s, historical sources such as letters, diaries, testimonies, memoirs and autobiographies can offer a unique perspective on someone's past, precisely because of their subjective nature.[8] They can

4 Beyens, *Els Borst*, 15–16, 29–32. The second Dutch participant was Goop Goudblom, who would later become a famous professor of sociology. See: Joop Goudsblom, *Geleerd: Memoires 1932–1968* (Van Oorschot, 2016), 52–59.

5 The British version of the World Forum of Youth would only get three editions (1949–51). The American equivalent lasted until 1972. See also: Catherine Bishop, *The World We Want: The New York Herald Tribune World Youth Forum and the Cold War Teenager* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2024).

6 *"The World We Want": Souvenir of the World Forum of Youth, Royal Albert Hall, May 9th 1949* (Gibbs and Bamforth, 1949). 7.

7 Part of a set of letters, written by Els, Dick or Lien Eilers, addressed to Piet, Jo, Klaas and/or Adriaan Langereis, 1945–63, private collection the Borst family.

8 Jacques Presser, "Memoires als geschiedbron," in *Uit het werk van J. Presser*, ed. M. C. Brands et al. (Atheneum—Polak & Van Gennep, 1969), 277–82; and Jacques Presser, "Clio kijkt door het sleutelgat," in *Uit het werk van J. Presser*, ed. idem (Atheneum—Polak & Van Gennep, 1969), 283–95. For more about the role and possibilities of egodocuments in regard to history writing, see: Arianne Baggerman and Rudolf Dekker, "'De gevaarlijkste van alle bronnen.' Egodocumenten: nieuwe wegen en perspectieven," *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische geschiedenis* 1, no. 4 (2004), 3–13; and Leonieke Vermeer, "Stretching the Archives: Ego-documents and Life Writing

provide insight into someone's way of thinking and feeling and their lived experiences—not only by carefully studying what is actually recorded in these documents, but also by taking into account what might be left unexpressed. Following the example of some prominent (cultural) historians such as Peter Gay, Roy Porter and Philippe Lejeune, Dutch historical diary specialist Leonieke Vermeer has stressed the importance of interpreting silences "as part of the narrative itself," be it with caution.[9] In this study, we will mainly look for silences in the sense of what is implied—but not explicitly stated—about experiencing life in Amsterdam, often in (silent) comparison to other places, such as the countryside or Great Britain.

As is expected of a travel diary, which is intended as a memento of those travels, most of Els's 1949 journal entries are focused on her experiences in Great Britain. But she also reflects on these experiences. It is in these reflections that we learn a lot about her home life. That is to say: about her life as a teenager in Amsterdam. Amsterdam was her "normal," her point of reference, and in everything she thought to be remarkable, strange, irritating or special about what she encountered in England, we find an echo of the way she experienced her life in Amsterdam. The same goes for the comparisons that can be found in Els's letters between city life in Amsterdam, and the country life she got to know at the Langereis family farm.

A Happy Childhood in Amsterdam

Generally speaking, Els Eilers lived a happy childhood in Amsterdam. As an only child of a lower-middle-class family, she was loved and encouraged to explore her interests and develop her talents. Els's father, Dick Eilers, descended from a line of Amsterdam coach drivers, had little to no education. However, as a smart and conscientious man, starting out as a low-level office clerk, he managed to become a manager of a small factory. Els's mother, Lien Eilers-Dorfmeijer, came from an Amsterdam-based family, as well, and had many relatives living in and around town. She herself was a housewife who—despite having only one child—loved a full house.

Research in the Netherlands: State of the Art," *BMGN—Low Countries Historical Review* 135, no. 1 (2020): 31–51.

9 Leonieke Vermeer, "'Cheerful Angels Looking Down on Us': Parental Emotions in Diaries about the Illness and Death of Infants and Young Children (1780–1880)," *The European Journal of life Writing* 7 (2018): 133–50. See also Leonieke Vermeer, "Tiny Symbols Tell Big Stories: Naming and Concealing Masturbation in Diaries (1650–1940)," *The European Journal of life Writing* 6 (2017): 101–34.

As such, the family hosted guests frequently as well as live-in relatives. Their flat at Uiterwaardenstraat 332 was not large, but it was clean, cosy and lively. It was located in a (then) newly built middle-class Amsterdam neighbourhood, Rivierenbuurt.[10]

Els played with her friends and cousins in the streets of Rivierenbuurt and in the nearby fields (which are now part of the Amsterdam neighbourhood Watergraafsmeer), she had a lot of family close by, and did well at school. For the young Els Eilers, Amsterdam was the obvious and natural theatre of her youth.

The Second World War as Disruption

What disrupted this childhood was the outbreak of World War II in May 1940. Els was eight years old at the time, and, all of a sudden, she was confronted with examples of severe violence and injustice. The Rivierenbuurt housed a lot of Jewish families, and many of her classmates (as well as her teacher) were of Jewish origin. Soon half of her class had been banned from school.[11] A bit later Els witnessed how her (Jewish) downstairs neighbours were arrested during a raid.[12] As such, she learned that Amsterdam was not always, and definitely not for everyone, a safe place. In interviews later in life, she stressed the frustration she felt during the years of the German occupation; frustration about feeling powerless and helpless.[13] In hindsight, she realized she had often been afraid. "Time and time again, you heard these boots," she explained, announcing "the arrival of yet another German soldier; and you never knew what they were going to do."[14]

On a personal level, the Eilers family didn't suffer too much from the occupation. Dick Eilers held a steady job, and generally speaking life went on. At least, it did until the final stages of the occupation. During the spring of 1945—the months prior to the liberation—Els herself would experience in various ways how dangerous a place Amsterdam had become.

In September 1944, Els had started secondary school at the Amsterdam Barlaeus Gymnasium. This well-known school—home to a lot of children

10 Beyens, *Els Borst*, 15–19.

11 Peter Jan Knegtmans, *Amsterdam. Een geschiedenis* (SUN, 2011), 362–67.

12 Jannetje Koelewijn, "Mijn vader zei: maak alsjeblieft je studie af. Interview met Els Borst," *NRC Handelsblad*, 15–16 December 2012, https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2012/12/15/mijn-vader-zei-maak-alsjeblieft-je-studie-af-ik-genoot–1167104-a708549#/handelsblad/2012/12/15/#124.

13 Ibid. See also: "Na de bevrijding (part 1)" [television interview with Els Borst]. 13 February 2014, NPO-NTR. http://www.npo.nl/de-bevrijding/13-02-2014/WO_NTR_480701..

14 "Na de bevrijding (part 1)."

from the Amsterdam elite—is housed in the centre of the city, near Leidseplein. Since most bikes had long been confiscated by the German occupier, Els travelled the daily three kilometres back and forth on a child's scooter. One day on her way to school—on 12 March 1945—she was stopped by a German soldier, near Eerste Weteringplantsoen. She was not yet thirteen years old. Together with many other passersby, she was forced to watch the execution of twelve Dutch prisoners.[15] A bit later two additional groups of twelve prisoners were executed as well. Els was undone. White as a sheet and trembling, she arrived—much too late—to class. It would take days before she could talk about what she had seen.[16] During her working years, Borst didn't talk about the war all that much, but in the last two decades of her life, she made a point of sharing her personal experiences to commemorate the war and to inform younger generations. She never explicitly expressed what witnessing this execution did to her, but she repeatedly explained that the war had made "a deep and lasting impression."[17]

Around the time of the mass execution at Eerste Weteringplantsoen, Amsterdam became a threat to her own life as well. The first few months of 1945—the final stages of World War II—are known in Dutch history as the Hongerwinter (Hunger Winter). Like everyone else living in Amsterdam at the time, Els and her parents struggled during those months. Especially for Els, things got dire. On the advice of her doctors, who feared for her life, Lien and Dick looked for opportunities to accommodate their daughter in the countryside, where food was less scarce. Lien's large family brought solace in the form of the Langereis family, consisting of (Uncle) Piet and (Aunt) Jo and their three sons, living in Anna Paulownapolder.[18] Just before her thirteenth birthday, Els was moved to the Langereis family farm, where she remained for about five months.

Back to Normal?

Halfway through August 1945—three months after the liberation—Els returned to Amsterdam, to prepare for her second year at the Barlaeus Gymnasium. A substantial part of the city was destroyed, there was still a

15 Els Borst-Eilers describes this in her speech, held at Fort De Bilt, 29 April 2009, The Hague, National Archives, Collection Els Borst, 341.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 341.

18 Beyens, *Els Borst*, 21–24.

system of food rationing in place, and a shortage of many things, but generally speaking, life returned to "normal." However, for this thirteen-year-old girl, Amsterdam had become a very different place. Up until her move to the polder, Amsterdam had been all she knew. She had been happy there. It was her home, but the German occupation showed her that it wasn't necessarily a safe place. Now, the threat was gone, but it seems as if Els had seen an ugly side of Amsterdam that she could not immediately forget. Especially since an extended stay at the polder had shown her an alternative.

The letters that she wrote to the various members of the Langereis family in the aftermath of the war betray a slight unease with the city, at least at first. She loved being home again with her parents and seeing her friends, but she also truly loved living in the countryside. She missed the farm very much. "I yearn for the polder!," she wrote in April 1946. "I wish the holidays would start already. This stale city air has been annoying me forever."[19] During school breaks Els visited the Langereis family. In between she demanded to be kept informed about the ins and outs of the farm.[20]

From the start Els's letters show a conscious distinction between the city on the one hand and the countryside on the other. In the letters written in the period 1945–47, more often than not this distinction comes with an implicit qualification. Where the Langereis family farm usually stands for a feeling of freedom, joy, and abundance, Amsterdam is often portrayed as a rather uncomfortable place of continual hardship. First of all, Els found it quite strange to be living in a flat on the third floor again. No longer could she just run outside, and she missed the freedom and space she had come to associate with the farm and countryside.[21] Second, for a young teen, Amsterdam was not much of a joyful place in the early post-war years that were marked by reconstruction. "Not much is happening here," is a phrase that returns a couple of times in Els's letters.[22] When she wrote about her dealings in Amsterdam, it was often with a feeling of discomfort, especially during wintertime. After the harsh experiences of the winter of 1944–45, people in Amsterdam were weary of the cold, Els explained.[23] And during springtime, the city transformed into a "gloopy mess."[24]

19 Letter to Adriaan Langereis, 11 April 1946. For similar sentiments, see Els Eilers, letter to Klaas Langereis, 14 April 1946.

20 For example, letters to Piet and Jo Langereis, 11 September 1945 and 16 October 1946.

21 Ibid., 16 October 1945.

22 Ibid., 16 October 1945 and 11 November 1945.

23 Ibid., 23 February 1947 and 17 October 1947.

24 Ibid., 11 March 1947.

Generally speaking, Els loved school. She had a nice group of friends, and learned easily. However, when she mentions school in the letters, it is mainly to stress the ongoing unfortunate material learning circumstances. The classrooms at school were old and "terribly draughty," and up until the winter of 1947–48 the school suffered from a lack of firewood.[25] Els's letters focus a lot on the continuing shortage of things in the city: a shortage of firewood, of clothes, of shoes, but especially of food. Quite regularly, she mentions the continued system of rationing; not to rant about it, but rather as a very normal—be it inconvenient—fact of life.[26] Els's father, who also wrote letters to Jo and Piet Langereis, reflected on that: "You must think, they write about nothing but food, but that's indeed what it's all about here in Amsterdam."[27]

Coming of Age in Amsterdam

Over time, Els's involvement and attachment to the farm lessened. Her visits became fewer and shorter, and the frequency of her letters declined. Els's interest in the well-being of all members of the Langereis family remained, but her interest in the farm weaned over the years. Instead, her Amsterdam life took front stage.

During her teens, Els's daily life in Amsterdam was dominated by school. Lien and Dick Eilers had only received minor schooling themselves, but were fully aware of the opportunities a good education could bring in life. Still, going to a gymnasium (a very old elite type of classical secondary school), and getting a university degree, was not something Dick had envisioned for his offspring. In his world, providing a good education meant something like completing a more modest high school education and following that up with some kind of (minor) higher degree. But due to the encouragement of an enthusiastic primary school director, Els ended up at the Barlaeus Gymnasium nonetheless, and Dick and Lien supported their daughter to the fullest.

At the Barlaeus, Els entered a different world. She was certainly not the only one with a lower-middle-class background at that school, but most of

25 Respectively: Letter to Klaas and Adriaan Langereis, 23 February 1946, and letter to Piet and Jo Langereis, 17 October 1947.

26 For example, letter to Piet and Jo Langereis, 6 December 1945, 3 January 1946, and 8 December 1946; and letter to Klaas Langereis, 8 February 1946.

27 Dick Eilers, letter to Piet and Jo Langereis, 9 May 1945.

her schoolmates came from a very different socio-economic background, and lived in the rich and elitist Amsterdam neighbourhood Oud-Zuid, near the school. At times, this made her feel uncertain and somewhat shy, but from the start she had the assurance of the friendship of Hieke Borst (later her sister-in-law) and Lotte Querido (a lifelong friend). Both had fathers who were medical doctors as well as university professors and both had mothers who had studied as well, which was still quite exceptional in those days.[28]

During her high school years, Els became a child at home in both families. There she found an inspiring world full of promise, and the more she felt at home in these medical families in the Amsterdam neighbourhood of Oud-Zuid, the farther she grew away from the farm life in the polder. Instead of discussing the harvest or the farm animals, Els's letters now described the pressure of exam weeks at school, scouting trips and visits to the cinema and theatre with all kinds of friends. Her eighteenth birthday, for example, was celebrated with a visit to the city theatre in the centre of town with Lotte, Hieke and one of Els's cousins.[29]

By the time Els entered her senior year at the Barlaeus, she once more seems to have felt completely at home in Amsterdam. By then, the omnipresence of the legacy of the war was gone. Living in and moving throughout Amsterdam was safe again, but it was certainly not only Amsterdam as a geographical place that made her feel at ease. It was mainly Amsterdam as a sociocultural space, and all the promises for the future that entailed. By the age of seventeen, she was a confident high school girl with a thirst for life and knowledge, living her life in Amsterdam, exploring what that city had to offer. Strengthened by some lifelong friendships, by encouragement of several teachers, and the unwavering support of her parents, she started to envision a highly educated and culturally rich future for herself.

It is this confident seventeen-year-old city girl that we find in the travel diary mentioned above, written between 10 March and 10 May 1949 in Great Britain. As one of the winners of a national essay competition, Els was offered the opportunity to participate in the World Forum of Youth, and she intended to enjoy it. She regretted not having been able to travel with the Dutch airline KLM, which was "so wonderfully modern [and] distinguished," but, at least, she was in England while her friends were at school.[30] How "nice"

28 Beyens, *Els Borst*, 24–25.

29 Letter to Piet and Jo Langereis, 4 April 1950.

30 Els Eilers, "Dagboek reis naar Engeland," 10 March 1949.

it was, "to be in London, while all normal people were at the Barlaeus."[31] The fact that Els qualified her classmates at the elitist Barlaeus as "normal people" testifies to her integration into that world.

Els enjoyed the forum very much. A couple of weeks in, she reflected on how the conferences and discussions with the other participants had awakened some new (political) interests in her. Somehow, this forum had "shaken her awake."[32] Sure, she enjoyed what she called "the charm of the international company," and the feeling of being famous: "walking around with a smile on your face, surrounded by people who look at you and think that you actually are someone."[33] But most of all, her perspective had shifted. She had gained experience and knowledge, and she would take that with her to Amsterdam.

England itself enticed Els far less than the forum. Several of her diary entries betray some irritation. Half of her time in England, she stayed with the Crow family in Cheltenham, and joined their daughter Barbara at school. She praised the friendliness of the family and their efforts to make her comfortable. At the same time, she lamented their British petty bourgeois existence.[34] But it was especially the school system that provoked her indignation. In her diary she noted: "These idiots all rise as one when Miss Miles or some teacher enters (also in class), and at the stairs they have to stay stock still until a teacher has passed!"[35] Furthermore, she found the education inadequate. The approach she was used to at the Barlaeus—more directed at understanding than at being able to repeat—was certainly "much more scientific," Els noted.[36]

Getting to experience British society certainly made Els appreciate her life in Amsterdam much more, especially the school practice at the Barlaeus.[37] Her British experience made her aware of cultural opportunities and intellectual challenges Amsterdam provided, as well as of the fairly democratic social relationships that characterized Dutch society in general, and the Barlaeus Gymnasium in particular; something she had apparently come to take for granted.

31 Ibid., 11 March 1949.
32 Ibid., 26 March 1949.
33 Ibid., 6 April 1949.
34 For example, ibid., 18, 22, 23 and 29 March 1949.
35 Ibid., 21 March 1949. See also: Ibidem, 29 March and 4 April 1949.
36 Ibid., 23 March 1949.
37 Ibid., 21 and 29 March 1949.

By the end of her high school years, Els Eilers was well on her way to set her own course. Her relationship with her parents would always remain a nice and loving one, but she starkly outgrew their world. Once she became a medical student at the University of Amsterdam, Els Eilers fully embraced all Amsterdam as a cultural and intellectual space that had to offer a bright, young women: friends, the university, sorority life, student rowing and a diversity of cultural entertainments. Visiting the Amsterdam Concert Hall was something she grew very fond of, in particular.[38] She was soon engaged to Hieke's brother, Jan Borst, who was also studying medicine. Her letters to the polder became scarce, and when she wrote, it was a testament to a busy student life: "Yes, I am very busy at the moment; I am hardly ever at home; because of classes, practicals, sorority meetings, going out, etc. Furthermore, there are a couple of exams coming up."[39] Dick and Lien Eilers, who over the years kept up their own correspondence with Jo and Piet Langereis, apparently felt the need to excuse their daughter: "Els has chosen a study that requires a lot of her time and effort."[40]

As a young girl, Els had been welcomed by some medical families in the Amsterdam elite. Now, as a student of medicine and at Jan Borst's side, she became one of them. As such, she not only outgrew the farm, but also her old Amsterdam neighbourhood, Rivierenbuurt. Still a student, Els married Jan in the spring of 1955, and as Els Borst, she ended up living in the Moreelsestraat, in the midst of the chic Oud-Zuid.

In December 1953, Els once more stayed a couple of days at the farm in the Anna Paulownapolder. From there she wrote to Jan, then her fiancé:

> Last week they apparently had partridge and pheasant for dinner. As well as eggs, those are the nice things of country life. The bad ones: that I had to turn off every "opus" I tried to listen to, but today they forced a sports broadcast upon me![41]

That same night, she was expected to join Aunt Jo at a meeting of a rural women's association. Resigned, she reflected: "It is quite strange to do all kinds of things for a couple of days that you would normally simply reject. Amsterdam always feels like such a world city after that."[42]

38 Beyens, *Els Borst*, 33–54.
39 Letter to Piet and Jo Langereis, 16 November 1951. See also, idem, 14 July 1952.
40 Dick and Lien Eilers, letter to Piet and Jo Langereis, 5 January 1951.
41 Els Eilers, letter to Jan Borst, 22 December 1953.
42 Ibid.

Bibliography

Sources

Borst family, private collection

Diary of Els Eilers, "Reis naar Engeland, 10 maart–10 mei 1949."

Set of letters between Els Eilers and Jan Borst, 1952–54.

Set of letters, written by Els, Dick or Lien Eilers, addressed to Piet, Jo, Klaas and/or Adriaan Langereis, 1945–63.

Collection Els Borst (no inventory number), National Archives, The Hague

"Na de bevrijding (part 1)" [television interview with Els Borst]. 13 February 2014, NPO-NTR. http://www.npo.nl/de-bevrijding/13-02-2014/WO_NTR_480701.

Literature

Baggerman, Arianne, and Rudolf Dekker. "'De gevaarlijkste van alle bronnen': Egodocumenten: nieuwe wegen en perspectieven." *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische geschiedenis* 1, no. 4 (2004): 3–13.

Beyens, Nele. *Els Borst. Medicus in de politiek*. Wereldbibliotheek, 2021.

Bishop, Catherine. *The World We Want: The New York Herald Tribune World Youth Forum and the Cold War Teenager*. Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2024.

Goudsblom, Joop. *Geleerd: memoires 1932–1968*. Van Oorschot, 2016.

Knegtmans, Peter Jan. *Amsterdam. Een geschiedenis*. SUN, 2011.

Koelewijn, Jannetje. "Mijn vader zei: maak alsjeblieft je studie af. Interview met Els Borst." *NRC Handelsblad*, 15–16 December 2012. https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2012/12/15/mijn-vader-zei-maak-alsjeblieft-je-studie-af-ik-genoot–1167104-a708549#/handelsblad/2012/12/15/#124.

Lejeune, Philippe. *On Diary*. Edited by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, translated by Kathy Durnin. University of Hawai'i Press, 2009.

Porter, Roy. "More Than a Foreword." In *Cultural Approaches to the History of Medicine: Mediating Medicine in Early Modern and Modern Europe*, edited by Willem de Blécourt and Cornelie Usborne, x–xvii. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Presser, Jacques. "Clio kijkt door het sleutelgat." In *Uit het werk van J. Presser*, edited by M. C. Brands et al. Atheneum—Polak & Van Gennep, 1969.

Presser, Jacques. "Memoires als geschiedbron." In *Uit het werk van J. Presser*, edited by M. C. Brands et al. Atheneum—Polak & Van Gennep, 1969.

Van Santen, Marte. "VVAA-top 100: 'Beste minister voor volksgezondheid ooit.'" *Arts & Auto*, 4 June 2024. https://www.artsenauto.nl/vvaatop100-elsborst/.

Vermeer, Leonieke. "'Cheerful Angels Looking Down on Us': Parental Emotions in Diaries about the Illness and Death of Infants and Young Children (1780–1880)." *The European Journal of life Writing* 7 (2018). https://doi.org/10.5463/ejlw.7.265.

Vermeer, Leonieke. "Stretching the Archives: Ego-documents and Life Writing Research in the Netherlands: State of the Art." *BMGN—Low Countries Historical Review* 135, no. 1 (2020): 31–69. https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.10784.

Vermeer, Leonieke. "Tiny Symbols Tell Big Stories: Naming and Concealing Masturbation in Diaries (1650–1940)." *The European Journal of Life Writing* 6 (2017). https://doi.org/10.5463/ejlw.6.209.

"*The World We Want": Souvenir of the World Forum of Youth, Royal Albert Hall, May 9th 1949*. Gibbs and Bamforth, 1949.

About the Author

Dr **Nele Beyens** is assistant professor of cultural history at Open Universiteit, Heerlen. Her biography of famous Dutch politician and medical doctor Els Borst-Eilers, *Els Borst. Medicus in de politiek*, was published in 2021 by Wereldbibliotheek.

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

4. Surinamese Diaspora and Belonging in Amsterdam: Childhood Memories of Ruud Beeldsnijder

David Grantsaan

Abstract: This chapter examines the memoir of Ruud Beeldsnijder, born in Amsterdam in 1927 to an Afro-Surinamese father and a Jewish-Surinamese mother. It explores his sense of belonging growing up as a second-generation Surinamese child in Amsterdam between 1927 and 1950. The analysis uses Nira Yuval-Davis's concept of belonging and Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's idea of emplacement. The chapter focuses on four key themes: the Beeldsnijder family's social life, his nostalgia for his childhood in Amsterdam, his memories of WWII and Holocaust commemoration, and his political development leading to his involvement in the Dutch Communist Party. These themes illustrate Beeldsnijder's coming of age and search for identity in both the city and the world.

Keywords: urban expansion; hybridity; youth movement; racialization; nazi occupation

Introduction

Ruud Beeldsnijder was born in 1927, in Amsterdam, to an Afro-Surinamese father and a Jewish-Surinamese mother. After studying history, he worked at the Royal Library in The Hague as a subject librarian for the eighteenth century.[1] In his retirement, he completed a doctoral dissertation about plantation slavery in Suriname, published as "*Om werk van jullie te hebben":*

1 I would like to thank dr. Babs Boter for encouraging me to write this article and advising me while writing the first versions.

Rensen, Marleen, Leonieke Vermeer, Laura van Hasselt and Ernestine Hoegen, eds. *Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity: Urban Lives*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2025.
DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-4

Plantageslaven in Suriname, 1730–1750, in 1994.[2] He was also active in several leftist Surinamese diaspora organizations throughout his life. In 2000, Beeldsnijder self-published a memoir about his childhood in Amsterdam titled *Tussen Noord en Zuid. Een Amsterdamse jeugd*.[3] This chapter analyses the memoir to answer the question: What factors contributed to Beeldsnijder's sense of belonging growing up in Amsterdam as a second-generation child of the Surinamese diaspora between 1927 and 1950?

Beeldsnijder's childhood is a very early example of a second-generation Surinamese diaspora experience in the Netherlands. He grew up before the most significant migrations from Suriname to the Netherlands which occurred in the second half of the twentieth century, especially around Surinamese independence in 1975. Since then, the second-generation experience of people born to Surinamese parents in the Netherlands has become much more common. Beeldsnijder's account of his childhood memories offers a rare perspective on Surinamese diaspora life in Amsterdam during the 1930s and 1940s. Gert Oostindie has observed that not much is known about the experience of Jewish-Surinamese people during World War II.[4] Beeldsnijder's combination of Afro-Surinamese and Jewish-Surinamese identity as well as being born in Amsterdam offers an interesting perspective on the complexities of diaspora identity formation and belonging. His affinity with Surinamese and Jewish history, as well as the history of the urban poor in the Netherlands, animate the numerous articles he published as a historian after his retirement.

The title of the memoir translates to "Between North and South: An Amsterdam Childhood." North and South here does not only refer to the respective areas in the city but also to the Global North and the Global South, both of which Beeldsnijder considers part of his identity. To Stuart Hall, the Caribbean diaspora is defined by the hybridity of identity.[5] Beeldsnijder does not use the language of hybridity but of polar opposites, placing himself in between. To find belonging amidst this tension, Beeldsnijder emplaces his self-narrative in Amsterdam. This chapter analyses Beeldsnijder's memoir

2 Ruud Beeldsnijder, *"Om werk van jullie te hebben": Plantageslaven in Suriname, 1730–1750* (University of Utrecht, 1994).

3 Ruud Beeldsnijder, *Tussen Noord en Zuid: een Amsterdamse jeugd* (published by the author, 2000); translations from the memoir and other Dutch texts are my own.

4 Gert Oostindie, "Kondreman in Bakrakondre. Surinamers in Nederland 1667–1954." In *In het land van de overheerser II: Antillianen en Surinamers in Nederland, 1634/1667–1954*, ed. Gert Oostindie and Emy Maduro (Foris, 1986), 46.

5 Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Columbia University Press, 1994).

with the tools for the analysis of emplacement in life writing offered by Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Narrative*.[6] This is combined with an analytical framework of belonging offered by Nira Yuval-Davis. To start with the latter, Yuval-Davis discerns three interrelated levels of belonging:

> The first level concerns social locations; the second relates to individuals' identifications and emotional attachments to various collectivities and groupings; the third relates to ethical and political value systems with which people judge their own and others' belonging/s.[7]

The three levels aid the analysis of Beeldsnijder's memoir and can be combined with Smith and Watson's notion of emplacement, as Beeldsnijder places his younger self in the city in both a physical and a social sense. Four themes shape his memoir. The first is his family background and the Beeldsnijder family's social life in the city. This aspect places him in terms of his social location, a concept used by both Yuval-Davis and Smith and Watson. The second theme is nostalgia for his childhood in Amsterdam. Yuval-Davis's second level of emotional attachment to the city is especially prominent in this part. This is expressed in the memoir by what Smith and Watson refer to as the attachment of the myth of self to geographic location.[8] The third theme comprises Beeldsnijder's memories of World War II and the commemoration of those in his life he lost to the Holocaust. Here Smith and Watson's question "What stories—of possession, dispossession, invasion, displacement, erasure, forgetting—are told of geographic and cultural spaces?" is incredibly relevant.[9] Also significant is Yuval-Davis's third level of belonging as the Nazi occupation imposed a political system in which Beeldsnijder's belonging was judged in a fundamentally different way. The final theme is his critical reflection on his political formation which led him to join the Dutch Communist Party (CPN). This again entails the relationship between a sense of belonging and a political value system as well as the identification with a grouping or collectivity of Yuval-Davis's second level. In the terms offered by Smith and Watson, the communist milieu of post-war Amsterdam had a strong insider–outsider dynamic and

6 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 248–49.

7 Nira Yuval-Davis, "Belonging and the Politics of Belonging," *Patterns of Prejudice* 40, no. 3 (2006): 199.

8 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 249

9 Ibid.

was a "space of sociality" that was historically particular to the Amsterdam of that time.[10] Through the progression of these themes, the memoir creates a coming-of-age narrative. The memoir has qualities of a *Bildungsroman* as it presents the story of a young man finding his place in the city and in the world.[11]

Family Background

Beeldsnijder begins his memoir with an overview of his family background through his parents' family trees. His Afro-Surinamese father, Jean Jacques Louis Beeldsnijder, was born on 31 May 1891 in Nickerie, Suriname. Beeldsnijder does not know much about his father's family history, only what other family members have told him. The name Beeldsnijder came from his grandfather's mother. What her background was is unclear. Beeldsnijder only remarks: "In every Surinamese family there are some Jews, some Indians, Hollanders and many unmarried mothers."[12] Beeldsnijder's mother, Estelle Hélène de la Fuente, was born into a Jewish-Surinamese family with a Spanish background on 23 January 1883 in Paramaribo. Her father was born in Paramaribo, but her grandfather was born in Naarden, the Netherlands in 1839. Her grandmother's d'Fonseca family had been in Suriname for generations. Beeldsnijder even came across their names in his historical research on the eighteenth century. Back then, the family-owned sugar plantations, such as the Mariënburg plantation, among others.[13] Through his family background, Ruud Beeldsnijder embodies a Caribbean hybrid diaspora identity created through the different diasporas that shaped the Caribbean.[14]

Beeldsnijder's father, Jacques, moved to the Netherlands in 1921. He had felt there were not enough career opportunities in Suriname.[15] This is slightly atypical. Most Surinamese people who came to the Netherlands at the time were those with money who came for education.[16] Jacques ended up working at the Rijksverzekeringsbank in Pieter de Hooghstraat. Beeldsnijder's parents were already engaged then, but his mother stayed in Suriname for six more years, working several office jobs, before coming to Amsterdam in 1926. A

10 Ibid.
11 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 262–63.
12 Beeldsnijder, *Tussen Noord en Zuid*, 1.
13 Ibid., 3–4.
14 Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora."
15 Beeldsnijder, *Tussen Noord en Zuid*, 1.
16 Oostindie, "Surinamers in Nederland," 26.

year later, in 1927, Ruud was born, followed by two brothers, Lucien in 1929 and Jacques in 1930. Their father fell ill in 1933 and passed away in 1935.[17] Beeldsnijder recounts how after his father's passing his family struggled economically on his mother's widow's pension, although she always managed to find a way to make ends meet.[18] Two of his mother's sisters and two of his father's sisters also lived in Amsterdam. In the neighbourhood, they had contact with several families, including some Surinamese families who they would sometimes eat dinner with. Other family friends were his father's colleagues, the Boom family, who were Dutch communists, and the Surinamese Zaal family.[19]

The Urban Space of Expanding Amsterdam

The emplacement of Beeldsnijder's childhood in Amsterdam as an urban space is a prominent theme in the first part of the memoir. These passages are filled with nostalgic memories of his experience of Amsterdam as a child and his strong emotional attachment to the city. Beeldsnijder spent most of his childhood in the south of Amsterdam West, particularly the Overtoomse Sluis area near Schinkel and Hoofddorpplein. Most of his early years were spent at Aalsmeerweg. He remembers being sent by his mother to the butcher at Hoofddorpplein. It was a route he could walk without crossing the street, the sort of thing that is important for a child navigating the city. He also remembers being on the back of his father's bike heading down Koninginneweg on his way to the office.[20]

During much of his childhood, Beeldsnijder lived on the edge of the city and the non-urban space just outside. After his father's passing in 1935, the family moved to Theophile de Bockstraat, right on the frontier of the expanding city of Amsterdam. Half of the street was still being constructed, from Woestduinstraat to Warmondstraat. Beeldsnijder remembers a big pile of sand at the construction site that kids could play in and slide down. The playground of the construction site forms a kind of transitional border zone between the urban space and what lies beyond. Beyond was a swampy area until Slotervaart and across the wooden bridge over Westlandgracht, there was the Brokhoff farming company. Beeldsnijder remembers how he used

17 Beeldsnijder, *Tussen Noord en Zuid*, 6–9
18 Ibid., 28.
19 Ibid., 29–32.
20 Ibid., 11.

to love to wander around the small lake Nieuwe Meer, Jaagpad, Generaal Vettersterstraat and Spijttellaantje. He brags that he managed to swim across the lake to Amsterdamse Bos, then called Bosplan.[21]

Living on the edge of the city during a time of expansion seems to have sparked Beeldsnijder's ongoing fascination with urban infrastructure. He describes how he would look 6out from the window over the meadows and greenhouses, imagining new houses, neighbourhoods and tramlines. "Looking back, I still do not know why I did not become an urban planner."[22] This would prove to be a lasting fascination as later in life he found an interest in drawing historical maps of eighteenth-century Amsterdam. In his memoir, he fondly remembers wandering around the city at around ten years of age, drawing maps of his journeys. He would go by tram or on foot, sometimes up to the north of Amsterdam. These memories are filled with Beeldsnijder's nostalgia for the sensory experience of the city. He writes that he loved the smells of the sawmills and rope yards at the Schinkel and De Baarsjes or Bickerseiland. He remembers hanging over the rails on the Schinkel bridge to watch the boats loaded with vegetables, potatoes and coal. He recalls the sounds of street sellers: the ice cream man, the fruit and vegetable man and the rag-and-bone man.[23] In these passages Beeldsnijder does not express an attachment to the people of Amsterdam but to the urban geography of the city itself.[24]

The War Years, Commemoration and the Politicization of Identity

In this middle part of the memoir identity and the politics of belonging become a more prominent theme. This is partly a natural consequence of the young Beeldsnijder's coming of age as he entered his teenage years. For Beeldsnijder these formative years took place during the Nazi occupation of Amsterdam. In 1939, when Beeldsnijder started reading the newspaper at twelve years old, he read about the German attack on Poland. The next year, he witnessed the Nazi entrance to Amsterdam at Aalsmeerweg.[25] One year after that in 1940, he began his secondary education at Barlaeus Gymnasium.[26]

21 Ibid., 20.
22 Ibid., 24.
23 Ibid.
24 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 249.
25 Beeldsnijder, *Tussen Noord en Zuid*, 34–35.
26 Ibid., 40.

The Holocaust deeply affected Beeldsnijder, as many people dear to him were taken away and murdered by the Nazis. In his memoir, he seeks to commemorate them and convey what they had meant to him. He remembers his first French teacher, Mrs Hess-Lutomirski, and the French songs she taught him. He writes: "These lines are here so that she will never be forgotten."[27] Beeldsnijder also commemorates family friends John Benjamins and Doctor Premsela and his family and what they meant to him personally. These passages clearly express his wish to commemorate.[28]

Beeldsnijder survived the persecution of the Holocaust, in part because of the particularities of being Surinamese and Jewish and because of the bravery of his mother, who refused to report herself and her children despite increasing pressure to do so. In 1944, he hid in the northern province of Friesland with forged papers. Gert Oostindie has found that it might have been harder for the authorities to determine Jewish ancestry for Jewish people from Suriname. This seems to have been the case for the Beeldsnijder family.[29] Still, it took bravery and some luck not to get caught. Beeldsnijder's mother was called in for interviews on multiple occasions, sometimes with NSB (The Dutch National Socialist Movement) members present. When asked about her grandparents because "she had a chance of [having] four Jewish grandparents," she replied she did not know anything about her grandparents. The civil official looked at her and ripped up her papers. Beeldsnijder's mothers and aunts also repeatedly refused to register themselves with the Jewish Council.[30] Another factor was Beeldsnijder's light skin and racially ambiguous appearance. He writes: "We were not Jews but negroes during the war."[31] Their racialized appearance might have helped them in several close encounters with German soldiers. According to Oostindie, black Surinamese people did not suffer racial persecution in spite of the Nazi's racist ideology. They were also not forced to work in Germany because of their "non-Aryan appearance."[32] As a seventeen-year-old, Beeldsnijder did get called up for forced labour in Germany, but it is unclear whether he would have been rejected. He probably expected there was a chance he might be forced to work in Germany because he avoided registration. Shortly thereafter, Ruud and his brother Lucien went to Friesland with forged papers where they spent the last months of the war.[33]

27 Ibid.
28 Beeldsnijder, *Tussen Noord en Zuid*, 35–40.
29 Oostindie, "Surinamers in Nederland," 46.
30 Beeldsnijder, *Tussen Noord en Zuid*, 59.
31 Ibid., 52.
32 Oostindie, "Surinamers in Nederland," 47.
33 Beeldsnijder, *Tussen Noord en Zuid*, 53–55.

In 1941, Beeldsnijder started to attend the prestigious Barlaeus Gymnasium. He writes that his mother had never expected her children would be able to go to that school. With some financial support for books and school trips among other things, he was able to attend. However, racial and class differences made him a target for bullying from some other children. He describes how at a school camp the others teased Beeldsnijder for his big suitcase (they all had expensive backpacks). One of the older girls who was friendly to the young Beeldsnijder was called "monkey mother" by some older boys for reasons he did not understand at the time. Despite this incident, he writes that over time he managed to feel at home at the school.[34] Outside of school, he had a social life in youth groups. During the war in 1942 or 1943, he joined the Nederlandse Jeugdbond voor Natuurstudie (Dutch Youth League for the Study of Nature, NJN). This group organized excursions into nature away from the surveillance of the occupying authorities. Within the NJN there were many members of organizations that were illegal under the Nazi occupation, such as anarchists and socialists. Though Jewish people were officially not allowed in the NJN, it did include Jewish members and people involved with the resistance.[35]

Post-war Identity and Politics

The dominant theme in the final third of the memoir is Beeldsnijder's political formation, particularly the process that led to him becoming a communist. He describes how after the war his younger self struggled to figure out his identity and his place in the world: "I began to ask myself what had happened in the world, and who I was, where I belonged, was I Dutch or Surinamese, Jew or negro, North or South?" In his search for answers, Beeldsnijder turned to reading and learning more about socialism, ultimately leading to him becoming a communist. However, as Yuval-Davis argues, "there is no necessary connection between social location and a particular social identity and/or particular political views. They both emanate as a result of specific social practices."[36] Specific aspects of Beeldsnijder's social life had pointed him in the direction of socialism when he was looking for answers. Through the Boom family and the NJN, Beeldsnijder had already come into contact with socialist ideas.

34 Ibid., 40–45.
35 Ibid., 47–48.
36 Yuval-Davis, "Politics of Belonging," 203.

However, there were also other options for him to find a place in a different movement at the time. In his memoir, he argues that perhaps he could have also found his place in the aforementioned NJN, in a liberal Christian group or a Jewish group.[37] In 1948, probably around the time of the declaration of the Jewish state of Israel, Beeldsnijder recounts being impressed by seeing a Jewish youth group marching through Museumplein. Beeldsnijder writes that ultimately, he felt more strongly about general societal issues than "exclusively Jewish issues." Shortly thereafter, he asked a friend who had recently visited Israel about the relationship between the Israelis and the Palestinians. His friend replied that he should have asked about the relationships between different Jewish people as she said there was much animosity between the Jewish people from Germany and Poland and the Ashkenazi and Sephardic groups.[38]

An important step in Beeldsnijder's political development was the moment he joined the Algemeen Nederlands Jeugd Verbond (General Dutch Youth League, ANJV). The ANJV had strong ties to the Dutch Communist Party.[39] Joining the ANJV meant leaving the NJN, which Beeldsnijder felt was too elitist and out of touch with the world. He writes that his biggest motivation for joining the ANJV was their anticolonial stances regarding Suriname and Indonesia. Anticolonialism had been instilled in him by his mother from an early age. Beeldsnijder found an ANJV group near Hoofddorpplein with whom he attended political meetings and demonstrations. They also peddled pamphlets door to door and went to summer camps.[40] A few years later Beeldsnijder would also attend demonstrations with youth movements in Belgium and France. He was so impressed by Brussels that he remarked that 1940s Amsterdam seemed provincial in comparison.[41] He discusses quite extensively the process that led his younger self to the decision to join the Dutch Communist Party. Again, the anticolonial stance was the deciding factor. In the years right after the war, the Dutch colonial war against Indonesia was the dominant political issue and the communists were the only Dutch political party with an anticolonial stance. The party was at the height of its popularity in that moment.[42]

37 Beeldsnijder, *Tussen Noord en Zuid*, 70.

38 Ibid., 67.

39 Robert Schurink, "Het ontstaan: 'Zullen we elkaar straks plotseling loslaten en vijandig aankijken?,'" in *De duizend daden. Een geschiedenis van het Algemeen Nederlands Jeugd Verbond 1945–1985*, ed. Tamara Blokzijl, Corita Homma and Willem Walter (ANJV, 1985).

40 Beeldsnijder, *Tussen Noord en Zuid*, 67–68.

41 Ibid., 74–77.

42 Arthur Stam, *De CPN en haar buitenlandse kameraden* (Aspekt, 2004), 17.

To come to his decision Beeldsnijder read extensively. The reading list is included in the memoir and includes both Stalin and Trotsky. The inclusion of Trotsky is remarkable since at the time he was considered an enemy by the Dutch Communist Party.[43] Ultimately, Beeldsnijder also found Stalin more convincing. In this part of the memoir the narrator Beeldsnijder is the most present in the text and very critical of his younger self. He comments that his younger self was not critical enough, caught in dogmatism and black-and-white thinking.[44] In most of the previous sections of the memoir, the narrator still identifies much more strongly with his younger self. But in these sections, the big temporal distance between the narrator and the narrated (young) self is the most palpable. As a young man, he believed Paul de Groot when he proclaimed that socialism would come to the Netherlands in ten years' time. At age seventy-three, he wrote his memoir after the last hope he had for a socialist world system had collapsed. The communist milieu that he became a part of was particular to post-war Amsterdam. During these years the CPN enjoyed the peak of its popularity, and it was especially strong in this city.[45] But when the Cold War began, the CPN started to decline and strong insider–outsider tensions emerged between communists and non-communists.[46]

Conclusion

What factors contribute to belonging in Beeldsnijder's identity narrative? By emplacing his narrative in Amsterdam, he created a sense of belonging despite the tension between North and South within his own identity. The four most prominent themes in the memoir are shaped by qualities that Smith and Watson associate with emplacement. The first is Beeldsnijder's social location in the city situated in his family's social connections to Surinamese, Jewish and Dutch Amsterdammers. The second aspect is his emotional attachment to the city which is directly connected to the geographical urban space. This is expressed in his nostalgia for his wandering around the city and his ongoing fascination with urban infrastructure. The third aspect entails Beeldsnijder's place in Amsterdam vis-à-vis others.

43 Stam, *De CPN*, 21–23.

44 Beeldsnijder, *Tussen Noord en Zuid*, 69–71.

45 A. A. De Jonge, *Het communisme in Nederland. De geschiedenis van een politieke partij* (Kruseman, 1972), 89–91.

46 Ibid., 93–147.

In his teenage years, he was confronted with the racial and economic differences between him and his schoolmates at Barlaeus gymnasium. During the Nazi-occupation of Amsterdam Beeldsnijder's racialized appearance and identity became politicized in the most extreme way when the social category of Jewishness meant persecution. His racially ambiguous appearance and Surinamese descent might have helped him avoid being identified as Jewish.

This part of the memoir is shaped by what Smith and Watson refer to as stories of invasion, dispossession, displacement and attempted erasure of Jewish life in Amsterdam by the Nazi occupation. Beeldsnijder expresses in his memoir the wish to combat this erasure by commemorating the people he lost through his life writing. This politicization of identity was a catalyst for the identity questions that are a part of his coming-of-age story. The fourth section again features emplacement of the young Beeldsnijder vis-à-vis others, this time based on his political affiliation with communism. This also includes the aspect of temporality as described by Smith and Watson as the narrator Beeldsnijder emplaces himself vis-à-vis his own past by critically reflecting on his political choices. The particular communist milieu that he became a part of was also specifically placed as a particular aspect of post-war Amsterdam. Through this emplacement, his memoir deals with questions of belonging on the three levels described by Yuval-Davis, ultimately creating a self-narrative that intertwines his identity with Amsterdam. In some ways, Beeldsnijder and Amsterdam grew up together as his childhood took place on the frontier of the city's expansion. The city had a lasting imprint on him, the sights and smells of the Amsterdam of his childhood stayed with him for the rest of his life.

Bibliography

Beeldsnijder, Ruud. "Het Koninkrijksstatuut resoluut verworpen." In *Vereniging Ons Suriname 70: 18 januari 1919–18 januari 1989: een aanzet tot de geschiedschrijving over zeventig jaren leven en strijd van Surinamers in Nederlands.* Vereniging Ons Suriname, 1990.

Beeldsnijder, Ruud. "Om werk *van jullie te hebben*": *Plantageslaven in Suriname, 1730–1750.* University of Utrecht, 1994.

Beeldsnijder, Ruud. *Tussen Noord en Zuid: een Amsterdamse jeugd.* Published by the author, 2000.

De Jonge, A. A. *Het communisme in Nederland. De geschiedenis van een politieke partij*. Kruseman, 1972.

Does, Ida. "In Memoriam Ruud Beeldsnijder." *OSO Tijdschrift voor Surinaamse taalkunde, letterkunde en geschiedenis* 23, no. 2 (2004): 359–60. https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_oso001200401_01/_oso001200401_01_0030.php.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." In *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. Columbia University Press, 1994.

Oostindie, Gert. "Kondreman in Bakrakondre. Surinamers in Nederland 1667–1954." In *In het land van de overheerser II Antillianen en Surinamers in Nederland, 1634/1667–1954*, edited by Gert Oostindie and Emy Maduro. Foris, 1986.

Schurink, Robert. "'Zullen we elkaar straks plotseling loslaten en vijandig aankijken?' Het ontstaan." In *De duizend daden. Een geschiedenis van het Algemeen Nederlands Jeugd Verbond 1945–1985*, edited by Tamara Blokzijl, Corita Homma and Willem Walter. ANJV, 1985.

Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

Stam, Arthur. *De CPN en haar buitenlandse kameraden.* Aspekt, 2004.

Yuval-Davis, Nira. "Belonging and the Politics of Belonging." *Patterns of Prejudice* 40, no. 3 (2006): 197–214. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313220600769331.

About the Author

David Grantsaan graduated from the research MA programme in global history at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. He wrote his MA thesis on Ruud Beeldsnijder and his work as a historian of the history of slavery.

II.

Belonging

DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-pt2

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

5. Jane Hoyake's Amsterdam Diaries: Life in a City under Siege

Polly North

Abstract: Jane Hoyake is unknown to history, except for her diaries. They span the years from 1939 to 1945, when Hoyake is living in German-occupied Amsterdam. The diaries are a gappy and "intimate history" of a Dutch-born peripatetic cosmopolitan, and of a city at war. Hoyake's writing exemplifies the diary's "poetic," including its spontaneous, extempore, private, writing as exercise and fragmentary modes. She also typifies the work of the gap hypothesis. This critical stance was prompted by thousands of unpublished diaries. More recently, published diarists—including Wittgenstein and Sontag—have further enriched its framework. It asserts that much study and life is a matter of trying to educate one's guesses about the unknown. Contrariwise, the least fragment can be rewarding if tantalizing.

Keywords: diary poetics; gap hypothesis; World War II; epistemic uncertainty; cosmopolitan identity

This chapter focuses on the dozen surviving diaries of a multilingual Dutch-born woman, Jane Hoyake (b. 1866). The blotted, A5-sized, pen and pencil etched, repurposed hardback exercise books are written almost entirely in English.[1] They contain something like five novella's worth of words accounting for the years Hoyake spent in a hotel in German-occupied Amsterdam (1939–45). The diaries are a haphazard and scrappy assembly of reflections, dreams, remembrances, conversations and religious scripture. It is these fragments—this everyday parade of hopes, prayers and sufferings—that tell us the precious little we know of Hoyake: somewhere,

1 Diary of Jane Hoyake, Great Diary Project, GDP 306.

Rensen, Marleen, Leonieke Vermeer, Laura van Hasselt and Ernestine Hoegen, eds. *Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity: Urban Lives*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2025.
DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-5

someday, we may find more, for now there are gaping holes in her biography. We must speculate about her or ignore her, and she deserves attention.

This chapter begins with an exploration of Hoyake's position as an urban dweller: the diaries tell us she spent a significant amount of time in at least three large European cities. We learn that in the spring of 1939 Hoyake was living in Birmingham with a Christian group, led by Percy—whom she calls her "master":

> I arrived here on August 27th 1939 by plane. It was beloved Percy in London on the 25th who hurried me with sisters Anne and Lillian in the bus; and that was the parting. He wrote later that he had done so, knowing the parting would be difficult. [...] I was sobbing, and had to master myself and get quiet. [...] On September 2nd 1939 war began, the great tribulation. Percy wrote then that he had made me leave because it was better for me that I was in my own country. He was right. I am still here. Shall I ever go away?[2]

On the outbreak of war, Percy compels Hoyake to return to Amsterdam and remain there. Staying in Birmingham would mean losing access to her "legacy" (inherited in Holland in 1923). Familiar with the city, she moves through it confidently and independently, even during the height of the occupation. Her ease in navigating The Hague and Haarlem allows her to pay regular visits to her Dutch friends. She often comments on street dogs, city gardens and chance pavement-side conversations. These moments form part of her everyday experience; they weave in and out of her conscious and subconscious awareness: 4 February 1944, "Now I dream of dogs. So often of dogs. [...] Is that to make me forget that bad dog in Haarlem?"

Like many diarists, Hoyake writes about her actions and choice making. She is determined to "self-abnegate." That is, the act of the self transcending itself—a contradiction in terms. The success of her ambition hinges on agency; more precisely, the degree to which she can enact her desire to relinquish "earthly" ties to her "ego", "money matters" and "friends." The real world city and the war seem to be an anvil against which to hammer out her spiritual being; both make daily demands on Hoyake, especially her sense of agency—and impotence. Throughout 1944 and 1945 she is "always hungry" and often too debilitated to leave her bed. In her seventies,

2 The group is dedicated to the writings of Reverend Holden Edward Sampson, who authored a series of books in the early twentieth century. These works blend mainstream Christianity with concepts drawn from Hinduism and astrology.

she narrowly survives the Hunger Winter. Many did not: 10 March 1945, "people fall dead in the street, for want of food." For Hoyake, however, the suffering caused by starvation exceeds physical deprivation, it becomes a spiritual ordeal. On 1 April 1940 she writes, "This morning all of a sudden I knew what is one of the earth's habits I must overcome, it is pleasure in food. Regularity in eating, and having enough. I never knew I cared so much for it."

The second section explores how Hoyake's diaries act as a kind of epistemic agent. She uses the form's "poetic"—especially its ultra-personal, fragmented, "writing as exercise", extempore and spontaneous modes—to navigate both her idea of self and her contexts, each of which is—at times—deeply troubling. Her quest is underpinned by elusive ideas, including agency. She helps introduce a diary-derived approach to ambiguity: the "gap hypothesis." Rather than papering over the liminal, the hypothesis invites readers to trace how Hoyake's use of the form foregrounds the eclectic, often gappy iterations of self-expression that typify introspective life-writing. The diary, as life-writing's most personal, rebellious and indistinct scion, is uniquely attuned to the elusive and heterogeneous experiential material it seeks to trace. Hoyake's autobiographical scraps, then, do not resolve ontological or epistemological ambiguities; they embody and stage them. In doing so, they help us sketch a diaristic logic that privileges gappiness, fragmentation and the provisional as modes of inquiry. Here, action unfolds not as a sequence of decisive steps but as ongoing negotiations—shaped by the war, city, friends, religion and the limits of Hoyake's own history, biology and psychology. Moving to the rhythms of experience, these fragments offer an alternative engagement with the idea of an autonomous self. They follow subjectivity in motion, refracted through a seemingly endless array of alternative visions of self and agency. Agency, in this view, is not a stable set of coordinates but a series of contingent effects—with very real, if fluid, aftereffects. As heuristic devices, the diaries invite us to consider what we can say about the diarist—and about agency itself—on teasingly slight data.

Hoyake's evocations of a sorely tested agency resonate precisely because she does not discuss her contexts and actions as a critic might. Her diary entries are often convoluted and unpolished: an outcome of thoughts in their raw, untidy and perhaps more revelatory state. Her feelings, experiences and ideas tumble out at speed and in snippets, perhaps out of fear that they might otherwise be forgotten and lost. Or perhaps they spring from the slippery or unwritable—the abeyant imprint of past experiences and emotions, or the whisperings of unconscious desires, habits and impulses. In this unfolding, Hoyake does not name autonomy; she practices the idea

of it—invoking its possibilities as she succumbs, relinquishes, decides, refuses and endures.[3]

The third section compares Hoyake's diaries with those of the more intentionally analytic, but equally well-travelled, introspective and penitent, Ludwig Wittgenstein (b.1889, a philosopher, WWI soldier and diarist) and Susan Sontag (b. 1933, a diary critic, celebrity intellectual and diarist). The diary offered Wittgenstein and Sontag a tabula rasa; they used the form as an open field for scribbling professionally and personally. Hoyake's writing echoes something of this capaciousness: the intention is to sketch rather than finalise the rhythm of thoughts. All three mine their place and circumstances for insight; they seek to know what their interior self can make of sensory experience. Beset by equal measures of perplexion and ambition, the trio appear similarly foxed by the human condition. They are all too aware of their human fallibility. Yet, their approaches to such fallibility diverge in degrees of philosophical abstraction and self-consciousness. Hoyake's conceptual density is perhaps strengthened by her refusal to overdetermine the "ambiguity of experience."[4] The diarists' daily enquiries—especially those concerning self and agency—find a natural home in the diary. The trio's diaries strengthen the claim that: the form is an apt vehicle for issues—such as agency and self—which are vital and perplexing in academia, but in our personal lives too. In harnessing the reflexive potential of the form's writing modes, the diarists show us how the diary can guide us in matters that are elusive; including, what we necessarily do not know about human interiority.

Hoyake and Amsterdam

Germany occupied Amsterdam on 10 May 1940. For five years, Hoyake and the city are caught together; cut off from the world, they starve and freeze: 11 March 1945, "[U]p again with much pain […] Butter is paid now 125 for ½ kilo. People fall dead in the street, for want of food." Hoyake's body is ailing, not least as a consequence of malnourishment; added to which the occupiers take away her freedom to travel, receive mail, eat in restaurants, walk at

3 Polly North, "Agency under Fire," *Close Encounters in War Journal* 7 (2024): 190–218 references the gap hypothesis.

4 Patricia Meyer Spacks, "How to Read a Diary," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 56, no. 4. (2003): 62.

night and to sleep without the threat of bombs. She "fears" for her fellow citizens as much as for herself. In the diaries, Hoyake describes growing up in Holland (it's unclear where). Her affection for Amsterdam reveals itself when she anthropomorphizes the city after liberation day: 8 May 1945, "The city is half mad with joy." She gives us Amsterdam scenes of desolate streets and empty restaurants; officers; black outs; "frost-filigreed" windows and noisy war-time machinery, its aeroplanes, bombs, and motorbikes. She replays conversations with friends or relatives. She reports the sensations of herself and others: empty bellies, frozen fingers and aching bones on ill-made sheets.

Hoyake's self-narrative often strays into the territory of self-fashioning, as it has for many diarists. The idea of agency matters here because Hoyake is energetically determined to influence herself. Critics debate the degree to which a person can control their self-narrative, or "narrative identity", and the ways in which that narrative can be authenticated.[5] Hoyake appears to make daily calls on her claims to agency as she asserts a desire to write a diary and, more significantly, to overcome "earthly" distractions. As an introspect, she especially evokes a desire for agency over her own being. Much of her diary-writing is devoted to her struggle to "self-abnegate"; to achieve intimacy with God, or "the experience of experiencelessness." She attempts to radically shape herself and divest herself of her will: "I have self-abnegated myself. I have given my will to God." She seems seldom to succeed and, as a result, is vividly self-critical. Her own self intrudes on her mission. Added to which, her real world contexts—her necessary and routine transactions with reality, including bombs, dogs, friends, soldiers, "money matters," hotel staff, starvation, memories and dreams—often interrupt her spiritual plane. Even without these interruptions, her efforting strains against its own logic: the will cannot divest itself of will. Many introspects, from Marcus Aurelius to Susan Sontag, have wrestled with this paradox whilst seeking a balance between agency and surrender.

For Hoyake the city is a metaphor for the parade of influences which are alike at work in physical places and our minds. Much as Hoyake wants to be a free spirit—free to be spiritual—she is anchored, to her physical contexts in Amsterdam, but also to her history, biology, religion and psychology. She

5 Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer (University of Chicago Press, 1992) introduced the term "narrative identity." He refers to the idea often in the fifth and sixth studies. It is now a conceit in life-writing criticism, Jens Brockmeier, *Beyond the Archive* (Oxford University Press, 2015), surveys the twenty-first century's variety of this field of study.

cannot surrender her "great intense longing" for "the thousands [...] killed or mutilated." It is precisely this inability to detach that motivates her to question the shape of "self-abnegation": "hundreds are dead, 30,000 have no roof on their heads anymore [...] I am wondering if self-abnegation [...] can include all thoughts words and deeds?"

Contrariwise, she is scathing of her home, declaring that Dutch people have formed a certain collective character: "If I could leave [...] it would happen that I would meet congenial people but where to find them in Holland? They are all the same, made from the same pattern." Her explicit goal is to transcend "myself" and "earthly" constraints as spiritually nugatory: 16 June 1940, "I live it [war]; I am in it; I look down on it; but [...] I only change in myself." On 10 May 1940 she writes as though Amsterdam is also able to go through the motions of transcending war: "life goes on as though there were no war." Hoyake seems prepared, up to a point, to submit to her religion, but much less so to the privations of war, or Amsterdam's norms. It appears that to appreciate Hoyake it is worth knowing a little of her country and the war, but she tells us—repeatedly—that they are of interest precisely as obstacles and distractions. She is the archetypal introspective diarist. Her surroundings interest her, but only insofar as she tries to leave them behind.

Hoyake's diary-writing is as much a reflection of her desire to self-assert as it is an act of self-assertion. Her religious leader, Percy, tells her that diary-writing is egotistical. In keeping with her nuanced evocations of agency, Hoyake continues to write. This is one of the very few ways in which she secretly defies Percy and his religious creed. The act does not empower her; it intensifies her sense of spiritual inadequacy. She continues to reserve to herself quotidian choices whilst failing—in her own eyes—to ascend to her desired spirituality. She can decide when to write and where to eat in the hotel. She can choose when to pray; when to complain to the hotel staff; whether to meet, or drop, friends and when to take trips locally. She operates as though she can make stabs at overcoming her perceived frailties. She berates herself daily, debating with herself the degree to which she can rid herself of self-doubt, of "earthly thoughts, words and deeds," even of hunger. There is another incongruity: Hoyake pursues sovereignty over herself as a misogynist. She is a woman who accepts that Percy is right to say that her sex is inferior. She refers to her "lowly" female state; religion seems to have persuaded her of that embedded reality. This is one of many instances where Hoyake combines self-abasing beliefs and self-doubt with enough self-respect to believe she has a degree of self-control. And yet, even when belief in herself falters she does not yield.

Diary-Derived Critical Tools

The complexity of this portrait of Hoyake's autonomy is compounded by three additional factors. First, Hoyake is almost certainly an unreliable narrator. She "hates lying," but admits to small deceits. Second, her grip on reality appears insecure: she describes sensory disorientation, forgetfulness, visions and dream hangovers. She gets "mixed up" and bemoans her "old brains." Finally, Hoyake is precisely attempting to shed her biography and her interest in it and there is no supplementary information (yet) against which to measure her account. Even her explorations of her inner-self are of dubious merit, in her own eyes. She seeks God, not self-knowledge. (Simple oversight, distraction, discretion, or decency may also contribute to her diaries' scrappiness.)

Irrespective of how much we learn of Hoyake, or her autonomy, whether it be a lot or very little, the gap hypothesis encourages us to remember that even the fullest account of a person's life is full of gaps. Life outpaces notation. Such gappiness is well-served by, often emulated in, the form's distinct characteristics; including its writing as exercise mode. The gap hypothesis embraces the epistemic texture of this diary mode: it is open-ended and explorative. Diarists rarely write with a sense of an ending. The exercise of writing may well have stated goals, for instance, philosophical epiphany or psychological or spiritual balance, but the premise is that it is in the doing that these goals are to be achieved. The writer, metaphorically, "takes out" their thoughts (philosophical, psychological, deliberately introspective or otherwise) and "airs" them. And, the point of the exercise—is exercise. Meaning arises organically and without arrival: well-reasoned or evidential pronouncements might be compelling but are also provisional. This type of self-writing is a continuous dance, suggesting an epistemology of process and absence that, when paired with the spontaneous or extempore diary modes, gestures toward immediacy, even presence. We see this approach in Hoyake's writing; an exercise done for its own sake and as a process rather than a product. If her work does not untangle the ambiguities of selfhood and agency, it certainly teases them out.

Like Hoyake, Wittgenstein and Sontag, who we will meet in the next section, used the writing as exercise mode to chase down their dilemmas, less to resolve than inhabit them. For Wittgenstein and Sontag, especially, this was not only a stylistic concession to the diary's looseness but a way of thinking. In both their personal and professional work, the exercise mode served as a rich counter-method to more "analytical", or absolutist

approaches.[6] Sontag deliberated over the epistemic stakes of adopting, on one hand, Christian and "analytical" approaches, and on the other, "spontaneous" and "organic" responsiveness.[7] Wittgenstein's philosophical and diary work deploys both types of process and illustrates how the exercise characteristic of diary can go beyond the form and amount to a strategy for the discussion of veracity and, by extension, ambiguity.

In his *Private Notebooks*, Wittgenstein pursues self-cultivation and the "redeeming word"; both are treated as missing and yet vital. Sontag's sense of absence is slightly different; she searches for her "authentic self." Hoyake, meanwhile, sought to close the gap between herself and God; indeed, it may be that God was only ever present in the gaps. In keeping with the gap hypothesis, all three wrote not despite of absence but because of it. The gaps in the diarists' knowledge or between their contexts and their self-control were an essential part of their lived experience. Indeed, what consistently worked for the diarists was not an impossible "redeeming word", but what was left to be doubted. Moreover, the diarists' fragmentary and open-ended approaches to their inconsistencies and contradictions constitute the texture of diaristic truth-telling: a mode propelled by uncertainty and that privileges process over product.

So, we can use the diary-form to explore ambiguity—a writer who may not tell the truth but tells a truth. Hoyake gives us a voice that is both crushingly isolated, insular, fragmented and yet expansive. It has an internal grammar that carries with it a testimonial force: a painful portrait of lived precarity and fortitude. The gap hypothesis reminds us to respond to the diarists' difficulties as a work in progress. It invites us to attend to the moment at a granular level, not merely what is said but how: the rhythms, hesitations, repetitions or idiosyncratic phrasing that lend an experience a felt reality, even when it is incompletely understood. The diarists may present tricky material, but they are emotionally, or affectively, reliable in how they convey mood, fear and psychological imbalance. In this way, the gap hypothesis functions as an epistemic aperture—an invitation to read for what resists synthesis, closure or coherence. We can hope to attain to complete lives, and decent understanding of the needs of others, despite the patchiness of the evidence we have of our own or others' interiorities. After all, diarists rarely pause to ask whether or not they are having an experience for which

6 North, "The Self in Self-Writing", 257-303.

7 Susan Sontag, *As Consciousness Is Harnessed to Flesh: Journals and Notebooks, 1964–1980* (Penguin, 2013), 274.

they have a workable language—they insist on exceeding their limitations by inhabiting them.[8]

Given such unsteady terrain, it is also important to the gap hypothesis, that respecting other people involves not pretending that we can open wide their souls. When we read a diary, even one made public, we are eavesdropping on what the writer may have assumed would stay private. Even the most respectful and dutiful reading can slip into projection, especially when interpreting what was never meant for us. We cannot say we know Hoyake *in toto* any more than an Amsterdammer can say they know Amsterdam (street by street, room by room, citizen by citizen). We are listening to the beats of a life. They are often arrhythmic.

Hoyake, Sontag and Wittgenstein

Hoyake's diaries cry out to a critic as a heuristic and epistemic case in point. As do Wittgenstein's and Sontag's; both were highly articulate and biographical subjects. Importantly, Wittgenstein and Sontag intentionally adopted and used the diary's "poetic" for quests that were both cerebral and emotional. The diarists used their contexts, and the form, as a way of correcting personal flaws: they deployed the diary and their experiences (large and small scale) of their real worlds in, what Sontag called, "project[s] of self-transformation."[9] Indeed, Wittgenstein tells us that it is a frighteningly real near-death experience, on the front line on 9 May 1916, that "gives life its meaning."[10] Sontag, in as much as she felt she was inhibited by the contexts within which she lived, was equally able to feel that she gained from the influences upon her, including philosophy.[11] In her diaries, Sontag tells us that she wanted to circumnavigate anything that got in the way of the authenticity of her "project," including, a lack of "spontaneity," over-intellectualization, or "consciousness-laden" thought and "self-manipulation."[12] She tussles with the "psychic forms of my culture [New York City, c. 1970], the meaning of sincerity, language"; Wittgenstein is caught up with "work, work, work" and war—and, like Hoyake, a deeply Christian attempt to be "happy," "authentic" and "good." If Hoyake evokes

8 L. Wittgenstein, *Private Notebooks 1914-1916*. Ed. and trans. Marjorie Perloff (Liveright, 2022), 39.
9 Sontag, *As Consciousness Is Harnessed to Flesh*, 315.
10 Wittgenstein, *Private Notebooks*, 173.
11 Sontag, *As Consciousness is Harnessed to Flesh*, 271.
12 Sontag, *As Consciousness Is Harnessed to Flesh*, 315, 291, 290, 278.

ideas of agency, Wittgenstein and Sontag explicitly refer to it. Wittgenstein wonders what would make a man "happy" if he "could not exercise his will."[13]

The entries in Wittgenstein's *Private Notebooks* appear to be written spontaneously and on the spur of the moment (extempore); they are also acutely personal, dated, fragmentary and, occasionally, coded. A much later piece (pieces) of writing, *On Certainty*, though uncoded and less consistently dated, is similarly fragmentary, certainly aphoristic. Signally, throughout his life, and writing both as a professional and an anguished penitent, Wittgenstein used jottings as a tool of expression. The diary "poetic" appears to have freed Wittgenstein to articulate, as best he could, what he was deeply aware of but only half saw. It also seems to have supported his desire both to assert propositions and yet get it across that they were provisional sketches, interim iterations. In the *Tractatus,* he writes of an "I" he cannot "objectively confront" and of a "will" that is only a "psychological reality."[14] In the *Private Notebooks* he refers often to: "sin", "authentic[ity]", "a happy life", "meaning", "virtue", "will", "soul" and "spirit."[15] He uses these words even as he appears to regard such ideas as lacking a precise philosophical language, accessible—if at all—as gappy and fragmented: "silent."[16]

Wittgenstein described his diaries as "my art of philosophizing" and tells us that philosophy might best be conducted like poetry. The diary's modes, like his philosophical methods, attempt to work outside the limits of systematisation. An approach the gap hypothesis is alert to. The diary's modes enable the fleeting and experiential to be at once inscribed and enacted, sustaining a live dialogue with the contingencies of experience as they emerge. This activity is perhaps reminiscent of a gesture Wittgenstein often made: trusting the grammar of the moment over the architecture of the argument. The way in which his responses unfold—their apparent naturalism—is part of the writing as exercise characteristic of diary and, importantly, it is part of Wittgenstein philosophical training.[17] Thus, it is little surprise that his diaries contain elements of the *Tractatus*, verbatim.

In Wittgenstein's, Hoyake's and Sontag's diaries we often sense the quality of language and experience before they have been heavily edited

13 Ibid., 274; Wittgenstein, *Private Notebooks*, 141, 175, 183, 191.

14 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Macmillan, 1959), § 4.111, § 4.112.

15 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Private Notebooks 1914–1916*, ed. and trans. Marjorie Perloff (Liveright, 2022), 137, 145, 165, 173, 175, 177, 181, 189; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, ed. Charles Kay Ogden and trans. Frank P. Ramsey (Dover Publications, 1998), § 5.641, 6.54, 7.

16 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, § 7.

17 North, "The Self in Self-Writing," 45.

and analysed and may be rendered less—not more—accessible. Like a haiku or an Imagist poem, such scrappiness can be an insightful snapshot, a glimpse of a moment in time. This quality depends, in part, on the diary's spontaneous and extempore modes. These reflect the way people "think aloud" in diaries as a matter of thinking or writing "in the moment." They capture the idea of the quick expression of a half-framed or emergent thought and have the potential to skirt round a person's analytic or reasoned states. The moment of writing, in these instances, exerts its own temporal and affective influence. These modes can perhaps open us to an idea beyond words, a suggestive meaning, or a surprising expression which was sincerely meant, if incompletely understood. Their seeming randomness and brevity is part of their power. They can capture something of the fleeting and amorphous; leaping ahead of overwrought thought processes to inspire an almost pre-reflective, intuitive and free-thinking response. These modes ground Hoyake's writing, and the reader, in the vividness of immediacy: 8 May 1945 "there just came out an officer, a splendid fellow. I said 'Canadian?' And shook his hand." Spontaneity allowed Hoyake to "wonder" at the experience of "a great [spiritual] peace" without deliberately pathologizing and, perhaps, then erasing it. We have already touched on the ways in which Sontag thought spontaneity might bring her closer to authenticity. Like Hoyake, she found the self-fashioning process as troublesome and contradictory. Yet, unlike Hoyake, Sontag explicitly aspired to a type of "self-transformation" that resisted "aggressive" ascesis (rigid self-control).[18] And, unlike Hoyake, but in keeping with Nietzsche and Sartre (whom she read widely), she had the training to frame her project as an intellectual one, and could treat autonomy as a precondition of the idea that one could approach one's consciousness. This framing sat uneasily with the "organic" and "authentic self" she sought. It seems, Sontag could no more will herself to be unintellectual than Hoyake could deliberately overcome her will and achieve oneness with God. However, the diary's "poetic" provided Sontag a register in which she might hope to scout round the more suffocating aspects of "aggressively" intellectual thought.

As well as having some respect for a certain diary-like abandonment of the "aggressively" cerebral, the rule-bound and analytical, Wittgenstein argued that such exacting methods risked overlooking the "earthly" activities that underpin the meanings we give things; cannot effectively marshal the infinitely varied and possible "forms of life," "grammar" and "words"

18 Ibid., 274, 228–29, 290.

that animate meaning and problematize the already "mysterious."[19] Using the diary's "poetic" in *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein notes that when readers see his final material they will not see some laboured, complete piece of philosophy. Rather, they will be led to insights into the philosophical endeavour which the very open-endedness and spontaneity of the method reveals better than an explicit structure might have: "I do philosophy now like an old woman who is always mislaying something. […] [E]ven if I […] hit the mark only rarely, [a reader] would recognize what targets I had been ceaselessly aiming at."[20] Wittgenstein implies he is firing off random exploratory arrows in the direction of an intellectual target he believes may be in front of him. Where he is contradictory and where he insists on going beyond mere provability gives us lesser mortals comfort as we pursue the same double acts.

The Uncannily Ordinary Diary[21]

Engaging as spontaneously, earnestly and fully as we can to the particulars of an experience perhaps helped our diarists overcome a little of their, "anxiety about our human capacities as knowers."[22] Attending to the present moment, as a Buddhist would, is its own way of knowing. It can help us have meaning for a thing beyond its proportions, if only temporarily and in a specific set of circumstances. It is this shaky immersion in the moment, or sense of a thing, that sustained Wittgenstein's self-refuge: "one can always withdraw into the self." He uses the word regularly in his diaries, in its ordinary and everyday sense, the way many diarists do, even as his philosophical precision assures him it is nonsense.[23] At once prosaic and profound, the diary's "poetic" gives us what is in plain sight while allowing for supposition. Combining our diarists' use of the form's "poetic" with Wittgenstein's philosophical insights; expands the spaces in which we can inhabit both the arcane and the ordinary in the ordinary diary. Neither indeterminacy nor everyday experiences can shore up our epistemic gaps, but both might point to something of what remains possible within such extraordinariness.

19 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, § 6.44.

20 Ibid., 387, 532.

21 Stanley Cavell, *The Uncanniness of the Ordinary* (Stanford University Press, 1986).

22 Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary* (University of Chicago Press, 1988), 4.

23 Wittgenstein, *Private Notebooks*, 87; Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, § 5.641 and Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 657.

Conclusion

So far from being free agents, Hoyake, Wittgenstein and Sontag show themselves to be rooted in an obdurate material world. To some extent, each explains why location mattered to their introspection. Wittgenstein discovered, in the fear he faced at the front, an alchemical force; one that affected his character and, perhaps, his philosophy. Sontag bemoaned her education and training and yet leant on both as part of her self-reflective practice. Hoyake's contexts were inseparable from her situation; they were integral to her "self-abnegation." The dissonance between the two was innervating. Hoyake's intimacy with the city was one of a physical person in a physical place: the city had a character and a life that intertwined with Hoyake's. It was anthropomorphized and she dreamt of it. There is not a precise architectural or scientific language for this person–place connection, and yet it is in "plain view."[24] Hoyake's evocations of agency are also diffuse (though hardly unusually so, the concept has long been disputed).

Even so, the idea of agency informs Hoyake's efforts at self-assertion, and continues to exert influence when we discuss it as a "useful fiction." Determinists, indeterminists, compatibilists, humanists and postmodernists raise the issue, they do so alongside other important ideas, including the relationship between persons, place and culture. The "useful fiction" concept applies to our contradictory tendency both to accept the factual force of deterministic narratives, and to imagine and frame narratives for ourselves and to seek to "commit" to them (as Sartre has it), or to live them out.[25] Hoyake evokes a relationship to Amsterdam and to her autonomy—the particulars of which "all belong only to the task." The words make sense only as much as and in their usage. What is "higher than," or what lies behind these evocations is, according to Wittgenstein, perhaps beyond words.[26] However, "it can make sense to doubt" even this.[27]

Importantly, our diarists demonstrate that our quest for the clarification of the nature of human interiority may garner well-grounded and comprehensible views but will be short of conclusive evidence. Perhaps, it is not so much that we can't grasp what is before us, it is that we cannot lasso its many iterations. Wittgenstein's later work took it that, "language varies so much that words and sentences become unfamiliar in their new

24 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 89.

25 See North, "Agency under Fire" and "The Self in Self-Writing."

26 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, § 6.432, § 6.4321, § 6.52.

27 Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 2, § 562.

context."[28] Even the ordinary becomes extraordinary in each "new context." The diary, by nature a form defined by variation, mirrors the complexities of this experience: its fragmentary, open-ended and in the moment modes allow us to circle the "limits" of our own incoherence.[29]

In the diary, the ambiguities of our trio's self-reflection unfold according to a critical compass that is—more often than not—free of academic rhetoric. Another logic is applied to their problems, and so the diarists, perhaps only occasionally, avoid importing analytic strategies that risk distorting, or squeezing out, what is already in "plain view." With a poet's touch for the profound, and using the diary's "poetic", Hoyake aptly uncouples agency from precise logic and debate and lays bare its naked ambition. She is not attempting to co-ordinate or understand life intellectually. She inhabits her experience and its description and is all the more perspicuous for doing so. Of course, such fidelity to the moment and what it reveals may itself be an illusion.

And yet, Hoyake shows us that the idea of agency is nothing on its own; it comes to something within her contexts and when we variously act in its name. She runs the agency narrative through her mind and appears to think, feel, pray, speak and operate as if it had merit. The alternative would be a slackened will to self-cultivate and to be tyrannized by war, or by her weaknesses and "culture." At times, our heads are overwhelmed by ambiguities and contradiction; amid such cacophony, a single orientation is not a given. Perseverance is a contingent efforting toward influence, however provisional and slight. The gap hypothesis takes it that we are well short of certainty, and that scattered insights may light our way, somewhat.

In this chapter, our diarists' writing became a heuristic device and epistemic probe. When we read diarists' evocations of perennially tricky questions, such as agency, we are shown what these questions have meant and how they have been used. In the age of AI, these issues, how we approach them and what we do with them, matter in new and powerful ways. The limits on the kind of truth an introspective diarist might aspire to are the limits of all aspirations to knowledge. Some of us, like Sontag, tend to think that there is perhaps a profounder truth—one more authentic—if we could only grasp it. The diary is something of a recognition that we have at least attended to the task of looking for it.[30]

28 Wittgenstein, *Private Notebooks*, 19; "each use is new," Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, § 6.54.

29 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, § 5.62.

30 Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 3.

Bibliography

Diary of Jane Hoyake, Great Diary Project, GDP 306.

Brockmeier, Jens. *Beyond the Archive: Memory, Narrative, and the Autobiographical Process.* Oxford University Press, 2015.

Cavell, Stanley. *In Quest of the Ordinary.* University of Chicago Press, 1988.

Cavell, Stanley. *The Uncanniness of the Ordinary. The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*. Stanford University Press, 1986.

North, Polly. "Agency under Fire." *Close Encounters in War Journal* 7 (2024): 190–218.

North, Polly. "The Self in Self-Writing." PhD diss., University of Greenwich, 2016.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another.* Translated by K. Blamey and D. Pellauer. University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Sontag, Susan. *As Consciousness Is Harnessed to Flesh: Journals and Notebooks, 1964–1980*. Penguin, 2013.

Spacks, Patricia Meyer Patricia, and B. Redford. "How to Read a Diary." *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 56, no. 4. (2003): 45–62.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Lecture on Ethics*. Edited by K. D. Levy, Edoardo Zamuner and Ermelinda Valentina Di Lascio. Wiley, 2014.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *On Certainty*. Translated by Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe. Blackwell, 1969.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. Macmillan, 1959.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Private Notebooks 1914–1916*. Edited and translated by Marjorie Perloff. Liveright, 2022.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Edited by C. K. Ogden and translated by Frank P. Ramsey. Dover Publications, 1998.

About the Author

Dr **Polly North** is the founding director of the Great Diary Project, London. Established in 2007, the GDP is the largest European archive of uncommissioned diaries by the non-famous. Orcid: 0000–0002–9880–4917.

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

6. Roaming Amsterdam in Search of Stability: Post-war Arrivals from Indonesia Represented in Diaries[1]

Eveline Buchheim and Ernestine Hoegen

Abstract: This chapter explores the experiences of three diarists—Thérèse Geerlofs, Piet Oomes and Toos Avis—who arrived in Amsterdam after World War II, part of the first wave of post-war migrants from Indonesia. Through their diaries, we follow their reunions with family, experiences with the city and struggles with bureaucracy amidst post-war shortages. The chapter contrasts their expectations with the harsh reality of settling in a city still reeling from war. It also examines the institutions designed to help them adjust and highlights how their personal, social and cultural capital shaped their lives. Despite challenges, the diaries of young Geerlofs and Oomes offer a more optimistic view than the more typical negative accounts, portraying Amsterdam as a city of opportunity.

Keywords: migration history; repatriation; urban integration; cultural adjustment; reception policies; personal narratives

Introduction

For centuries, the city of Amsterdam had an extremely profitable connection to the former colony of the Netherlands East Indies in Indonesia. This went back to the end of the sixteenth century, when individual Dutch ventures opened up trade routes and eventually joined forces with the founding of the United East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, VOC)

1 The authors would like to thank Jennifer Foray, Elsbeth Locher-Scholten and the reviewers of this volume for their invaluable contributions to this article.

Rensen, Marleen, Leonieke Vermeer, Laura van Hasselt and Ernestine Hoegen, eds. *Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity: Urban Lives*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2025.
DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-6

on 20 March 1602. Most of the Dutch companies subsequently established in Indonesia had their head offices in Amsterdam and huge profits were made. This resulted in many imposing "colonial" buildings such as the Bushuis (first built in 1550) on Kloveniersburgwal, the Oost-Indisch Huis (completed in 1606) on Oude Hoogstraat and the Bazel (completed in 1926) on Vijzelstraat. With the impact of the Second World War, Amsterdam's sheen was fast fading, yet the city still sounded so full of promise to many Dutch inhabitants of Indonesia at the end of the harsh war years under Japanese occupation (1942–45).

> Amsterdam was our next and final stop. Here my family was waiting for us, and my two sons. Words cannot describe the feeling I had when I finally landed in my mother country after so many years, and I saw my two sons running towards me on a-lighting from the plane.[2]

With these words Elisabeth van Thiel described her arrival at Schiphol Airport in March 1946 after years of internment under the Japanese occupation. At the time, many *Indisch* Dutch still assumed that pre-war colonial arrangements would soon be restored.[3] Yes, they would go to the Netherlands, but only temporarily in order to recuperate from their ordeal. After that, they intended to go back to Indonesia to rebuild their lives and their destroyed homes. But the end of Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia was imminent, and the aftermath of the colonial past would be long and painful. What followed was a hard-fought colonial war in the late 1940s, with the situation in Indonesia becoming increasingly chaotic. Those with Dutch connections, or who felt they would be safer in the Netherlands, felt compelled to leave.

The new arrivals from Indonesia were referred to by a variety of names. In the immediate post-war years, this was often "evacuee," or "Indies war victim." Ironically, the term "repatriate" was even more widely used, even though many of them had never before set foot on European shores. Furthermore, there was little agreement on the definition of "repatriate," and institutions and organizations developed their own understanding of who qualified as such. This lack of consensus was allowed to persist in part because, for a long time, the presence of these arrivals was presumed

2 Elisabeth van Thiel, *P.O.W. 4036*, typed memoirs (undated), NIOD 11.33 Thi, p. 90.

3 *Indisch* is a complex term referring to people of mixed Dutch-Indonesian descent as well as Dutch former inhabitants of colonial Indonesia who still feel strongly connected to that country.

to be temporary.[4] Because the reception and experiences of individuals relocating from Indonesia to the Netherlands in the post-war years are so diverse, it is impossible to settle for one particular term, and therefore we use the terminology interchangeably.

The returnees arrived in the Netherlands in several waves. In a 1958 report, which was commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Social Work to examine the social integration of those repatriated from Indonesia, Kraak and Ploeger distinguish three: the first between 1945 and 1949, the second between 1949 and 1951, and the third from 1952 onwards.[5] In this chapter, we mainly focus on the first wave. Although at the time both politicians and the general public tended to see the people arriving from Indonesia as a homogenous group, not only was the number of returnees in each wave diverse, but the composition of the group and their future prospects also varied.[6] The common denominator was that they all had to regain livelihood security, but the conditions under which they had to do so varied enormously. The war years and the subsequent Indonesian War of Independence had led to widespread personal and financial losses yet there were significant differences in socio-economic, cultural and political backgrounds, and therefore in social and cultural capital.[7]

It is widely held that The Hague is the most *Indisch* city of the Netherlands, even being nicknamed the "Widow of the Indies." But at the beginning of the twenty-first century, in absolute numbers, more people with Indonesian roots had arrived and ultimately settled in Amsterdam.[8] Can we even come close to imagining how the newcomers must have perceived their arrival in this city? After years of war and hardship, the loss of family and friends, housing and jobs, their pre-war lives were completely shattered, and

4 J. H. Kraak and Nel Ploeger, *De Repatriëring uit Indonesië: Een onderzoek naar de integratie van de gerepatrieerden uit Indonesië in de Nederlandse samenleving* (Staatsdrukkerij- en Uitgeverijbedrijf, 1958), 15–19.

5 Despite Kraak and Ploeger being sceptical about the necessity of distinguishing further waves, later researchers, such as Willems, discern five waves. Wim Willems, *De uittocht uit Indië 1945–1995* (Bert Bakker, 2001), 19–176.

6 Kraak and Ploeger, *De Repatriëring uit Indonesië*, 119–23.

7 Pierre Bourdieu, *Forms of Capital: General Sociology, Volume 3: Lectures at the Collège de France 1983–84*, trans. Peter Collier (Polity Press, 2021).

8 See Peter Schumacher, "Indische sporen in Amsterdam," *Ons Amsterdam*, 18 October 2014, https://onsamsterdam.nl/artikelen/indische-sporen-in-amsterdam; Peter Schumacher, "Indisch Amsterdam," *Java Post*, 20 November 2014, https://javapost.nl/2014/11/20/indisch-amsterdam; Wim Willems, "De gespletenheid van Tjalie Robinson," *Ons Amsterdam*, 29 September 2007, https://onsamsterdam.nl/artikelen/de-gespletenheid-van-tjalie-robinson; Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, *Migratie als DNA van de stad Amsterdam 1550–2021* (Atlas Contact, 2021), 115.

many of them experienced existential anxiety. Their ontological security, understood by Browning and Joenniemi as "a subject's capacity to uphold a stable view of its environment and thereby 'go on' with everyday life," had gradually regressed into ontological *in*security.[9] The moment they disembarked they were compelled to adapt to the new circumstances, readjusting to a new reality, often even creating a new identity. Regaining ontological security "is not just a question of stability but also adaptability, i.e. openness towards and the ability to cope with change."[10] This is especially relevant in times of crisis.

Initially, the facilities and organizations for war victims relocating to the Netherlands were set up in the spirit of welfare. Meeus, Arnaut and Van Heur refer to the entire range of institutions and connections as the "arrival infrastructure," that is to say, "those parts of the urban fabric within which newcomers become entangled on arrival."[11] But in time the attitude towards people of mixed descent coming from Indonesia became more and more patronizing and condescending, echoing feelings of colonial superiority. In this chapter, we look at how several individuals coming from Indonesia as part of the first wave dealt with the Amsterdam arrival infrastructure, and how they set about rebuilding their lives. Using contemporary diaries and personal documents archived at NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam, we follow their trek along institutions, family and friends, and use the lens of how they literally roamed the city, trying to make it their own.[12] Since personal stories are also conditioned by the surrounding cultural world, these individual accounts may offer insight into the more general experience of returnees, as well as how the general public perceived their arrival and reception.

In our analysis, we not only consider the individual experiences of the returnees as recorded in diaries and other personal documents, but also the place of arrival itself: the city of Amsterdam and the institutions and places the returnees came into contact with—both voluntarily and

9 Christopher S. Browning and Pertti Joenniemi, "Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity," *Cooperation and Conflict* 52, no. 1 (2017): 31.

10 Ibid., 32.

11 Bruno Meeus, Karel Arnaut and Bas van Heur, "Migration and the Infrastructural Politics of Urban Arrival," in *Arrival Infrastructures: Migration and Urban Social Mobilities*, ed. Breno Meeus, Karel Arnaut and Bas van Heur (Routledge, 2019): 1.

12 NIOD has a large collection of World War II diaries, also from the former Netherlands East Indies. The diaries quoted in this article were all selected on the basis of the explicit references to arriving and staying in Amsterdam. All translations from Dutch to English are by the authors of this article.

involuntarily—upon debarkation. Sites of work and schooling as well as places of leisure, social networks such as family, shops selling Indonesian products, and cultural meeting points were all part of the "concentrations of institutions, organizations, social spaces, social networks and actors which facilitate arrival."[13] In these locations and with the assistance of different contacts the newcomers became acquainted with the city.

Arrival in Amsterdam

> So I went to sleep and woke up the next morning moored to the Levant quay in Amsterdam. Inexpressible emotion![14]

This is how the young widow T. C. "Toos" Avis-Hulstijn described her relief at arriving with her six-year-old daughter Mieke in the Amsterdam harbour on 8 March 1946. Her diary, which runs from January 1943 until August 1951, is addressed to her daughter. It starts with a summary of a baby book lost in the turmoil of the war and continues with journal entries. It contains recollections of her deceased husband, Guus, a lawyer who died in 1943 as a prisoner of war in Thailand, as well as day-to-day accounts of internment under the Japanese occupiers, and finally descriptions of the new life Toos and Mieke built for themselves in Amsterdam.

Three days later, P. A. "Piet" Oomes, travelling by himself from Indonesia to Amsterdam as a nineteen-year-old student, also arrived by ship:

> Monday 11 March 1946. In the morning arrived at IJmuiden. In the locks at 12 o'clock. Received a warm welcome from the people of IJmuiden, especially the boys, who started throwing snowballs. Lots of shouting [...]! Arrived at the K.N.S.M. quay at around 3 and welcomed with music and the Wilhelmus [national anthem]. Very cold weather and misty![15]

Some came to Amsterdam via other routes. In the night of 23–24 November 1945—some three months after Japan had capitulated on 15 August 1945—the very first repatriates landed at Schiphol Airport. Soon after,

13 Susanne Wessendorf and Malte Gembus, "The Social Front Door: The Role of Social Infrastructures for Migrant Arrival," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50, no. 12 (2024): 2825; David Robinson, "The Neighbourhood Effects of New Immigration," *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 42, no. 10 (2010): 2451–66.

14 Diary of T. C. Avis-Hulstijn, entry for September 1946, NIOD 401:161 Avis-Heelsteyn F. C. [sic].

15 Diary of P. A. Oomes, entry for 11 March 1946, NIOD 401:153.

others began arriving in the harbour of Rotterdam.[16] On 24 May 1946, T. C. "Thérèse" Geerlofs, another nineteen-year-old, disembarked with her sister and parents before boarding a bus and being dropped off at her uncle's house on Apollolaan in Amsterdam. In her diaries, which cover her formative years until 1947 and were published by her son in 2015, she recounted very mixed feelings upon having to leave the ship. "Everyone was rather sombre, because many of us had made friends on board and enjoyed the trip. I felt really sad too, at having to say goodbye to our friends."[17]

These quotes give an impression of how high emotions could run for the new arrivals. They also offer glimpses of the very different personal circumstances, ranging from recently widowed with a small child, to very young, travelling alone or with family as a teenager. All had experienced the Japanese occupation and the loss of their pre-war lives in Indonesia. Hovering between exhaustion, fear, hope and uncertainty, the best word to describe their mindset might be ambivalence.

A similar ambivalence prevailed in the Netherlands, both among the Dutch population and the authorities. The government presumed they would have to organize the evacuation and reception of some 20,000 people coming from Indonesia to recover from the horrors of war.[18] The first repatriates were indeed considered war victims, who were entitled to shelter and care. However, once the numbers began rising, with 330,000 people eventually arriving in the Netherlands between 1945 and 1968, an increasingly strict migration policy was introduced. Of course, the outlook for the Netherlands after the end of the Second World War was also far from rosy. Here, too, many lives had been lost, and infrastructure, housing and businesses—indeed whole city centres—had been destroyed. There was a shortage of food, fuel and textiles, and many products were still rationed. Although they had suffered comparatively little damage from bombing, the citizens of Amsterdam were preoccupied with their own particular problems and losses. A large part of its Jewish population had not survived the war, and in the early months of 1945 several thousand others had died of cold and starvation in the Hunger Winter.

Arriving in such a physically and mentally damaged city was always going to be a challenge. With the words "[a] chain of ships and planes with

16 Martin Bossenbroek, *De Meelstreep. Terugkeer en opvang na de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Bert Bakker, 2001), 160.

17 Diary of T. C. Geerlofs, entry for 24 May 1946. Published as: T. C. Geerlofs, *Jeugdherinneringen, Dagboeken. Semarang-Soerabaja-Amsterdam 1927–1947*, collected by C. H. Schuckman (Pro-book.nl, 2015), NIOD: 11.33 GEE.

18 Ulbe Bosma, Remco Raben and Wim Willems, *De Geschiedenis van Indische Nederlanders* (Bert Bakker, 2016), 47.

repatriates will connect the East with the motherland," the booklet *Koers West* misleadingly suggested a sense of connectivity and a warm welcome for all those arriving from Indonesia.[19] In reality, resettling in Amsterdam was tough. The housing shortage in Amsterdam was enormous, and the first obstacle to be overcome after disembarking was accommodation. All the diarists quoted earlier in this paragraph were met by family, triggering an emotional and often exhausting cycle of family visits. Toos Avis-Hulstijn wrote: "The next few days were dead-tiring, emotion after emotion and always the same stories. Camp life—death of Papa—journey etc. etc."[20] Many of the returnees, even when they were able to stay with family, had to frequently move due to lack of space. Toos Avis mentioned several different addresses, and there are traces of the difficulties and tensions involved in having no place to call one's own. On 14 January 1947 she received her husband's final letter, written just before his death in 1943. The next day she wrote in her diary: "I had to be nice to my landlady and her mother and it was so hard. I longed so much to be alone and to be able to think."[21] Thérèse Geerlofs and her sister moved back and forth between two addresses in Amsterdam, on Apollolaan and Da Costakade, depending on which aunt and uncle had room for them. Piet Oomes was warmly welcomed by an aunt and uncle living in Willem Beukelsstraat, and wrote delightedly: "I have my own little room with a bed, washbasin and small wardrobe."[22] But Piet, too, soon had to move on, first having to relocate to the southern Dutch town of Breda, where he moved in with another uncle. Even then, this address was only temporary, and on Sunday, 26 January 1947, he recorded in his diary: "Today Uncle Piet told me I need to make room for Ineke from Bandoeng."

Those who could not board with family were dependent on the Dutch government to help provide shelter. In November 1945, a repatriation service was set up in order to organize housing. The accommodation was centrally assigned. Five per cent of social housing was reserved for the repatriates, and this led to antagonism among the Dutch population, also desperate for accommodation. The Social Services eventually resorted to concluding contracts with guesthouses and hotels, the so-called "*contractpensions*," for people from Indonesia who could not move in with family in the Netherlands. Repatriates had to pay 60 per cent of their monthly allowance for room

19 Repatriëringsdienst Indië, *Koers West* (Boom Ruygrok N.V., 1947), 13. This booklet was written on behalf of the repatriation service, an organization residing under the Ministry of Overseas Affairs.

20 Diary of T. C. Avis-Hulstijn, entry for September 1946.

21 Ibid., entry for 15 January 1947.

22 Diary of P. A. Oomes, entry for 12 March 1946.

and board. Due to the very limited space available, and the stark cultural differences, life in these pensions could be very stressful.[23] Again, experiences varied greatly, depending on the personal situation, and for those who had relatives, the (lack of) governmental facilities had less of an impact.[24]

Navigating Bureaucracies

For those seeking a future in the Netherlands, bureaucracy had already started in Indonesia, well before departure, and there were many institutions and organizations involved in the locating and recovery of prisoners of war and internees, and the organization of their repatriation.[25] In the Netherlands, this bureaucracy continued unabated. The Dutch East Indies Alliance of Former Prisoners of War and Internees (NIBEG) therefore distributed a *Guide for Indisch Repatriates* giving an overview of all the new arrivals' obligations and benefits.[26] Travelling on his own, without a parent or guardian to accompany or help him, Piet Oomes is of particular interest regarding the administrative and financial side of trying to set up a new life in Amsterdam. Two days after being dropped off at his aunt and uncle's home on Willem Beukelsstraat in the Don Bosco neighbourhood of East Amsterdam, he wrote: "In the afternoon went with Aunty to several offices to fulfil different formalities a.o. the DBVO [Districts Bureau Verzorging Oorlogsslachtoffers, District Office Care for War Victims]. Received f. 50.- as final instalment of [repatriation] allowance."[27] On 23 March, he reported to the municipal registry for a registration card. Then, on 15 April,

23 For an extensive report on life in the "*contractpensions*," see: Griselda Molemans, *Opgevangen in andijvielucht: De opvang van ontheemden uit Indonesië in kampen en contractpensions en de financiële claims op basis van uitgebleven rechtsherstel*, ed. Linda Crombach, 3rd ed. (Quasar Books, 2019).

24 Margaret Leidelmeijer, *Ervaringen over de terugkeer en opvang van burgers uit NL-I in NL in de periode 1946–1952* (2001), 211.

25 These included the Red Cross, RAPWI (Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees), NICA (Netherlands Indies Civil Administration), KDP (Kantoor Displaced Persons), LOC (Leger Organisatie Centrum) and Dienst Volksgezondheid, to which were soon added the Indonesian organization POPDA (Panitia Oeroesan Penangkoetan Djepand dan APWI), CEB (Centraal Evacuatie Bureau) and Bureau Repatriëring Indië. Willems, *De uittocht uit Indië*, 4–26 and 44.

26 M. den Hartogh, *Gids voor Indische repatrianten* (Nederlandsch-Indische Bond van Ex-Krijgsgevangenen en -Geïnterneerden, 1948). The NIBEG saw it as their task to perpetuate the sense of community and destiny among the arrivals, promoting the material and social interests of the repatriates. Especially in the early pre-war years, they functioned as an interest group for war victims from the Dutch East Indies.

27 Diary of P. A. Oomes, entry for 14 March 1946.

he experienced a particularly frustrating day being sent back and forth from one institution to another:

> First to the CBVO [Centraal Bureau Verzorging Oorlogsslachtoffers, Central Office Care for War Victims] but was told to come back at 2 o'clock. So went to the Java Bank [at Keizersgracht 664–68] to exchange my money.[28] Was given a number. […] At 2 o'clock back to the Java Bank, but there I was told I wasn't an adult yet and therefore needed "proof of receipt" of my guardian. Come back tomorrow. Then went to the CBVO to pick up my deposit. Paid taxes for the first time here in Holland, namely f. 10.-. So I only received f. 90.-. Home [on Willem Beukelsstraat] at 4 o'clock.[29]

A day later, Oomes moved to the southern city of Breda, in order to attend a small "transitional school" (*overbruggingsonderwijs*), part of a network of special junior and secondary schools aimed at helping young people just arrived from Indonesia to adapt to the Dutch system and catch up with their Dutch peers.[30] Even so, his doings with the bureaucracies in both cities continued. In his diary he recorded visits to the local DBVO for clothing and for payment of chores rendered aboard the Dutch passenger ship *Tegelberg*, as well as the charity Stichting Nederland helpt Indië, where he was also given clothing.

In the next few years, Piet's three brothers and his father arrived one by one from Indonesia, with Piet helping them in turn deal with the Amsterdam arrival infrastructure. His diary clearly shows how tough the times were for the family, all of them relying on the distribution of clothing by the CBVO, the DBVO and charity. For example, on Monday, 6 July 1947, he recorded: "In the morning, we all went into the city. First to the civil registry then to 'Nederland helpt Indië.' There I received underwear and one pair of socks."[31]

Re-establishing Everyday Life

Securing passage to the Netherlands, finding accommodation and struggling through the bureaucratic jungle were but the first obstacles to be overcome in

28 Amsterdamse grachtenhuizen, "Javasche Bank," https://amsterdamsegrachtenhuizen.info/bedrijf/bedr-ijk/javasche/index.html.

29 Diary of P. A. Oomes, entry for 15 April 1946.

30 Willems, *Uittocht uit Indië*, 75.

31 Diary of P. A. Oomes, entry for 6 July 1947.

the search for ontological security and a sense of belonging. The next challenge was re-establishing a "normal," everyday life in all its facets. For the younger ones, schooling was of primary importance. Although almost everyone of Dutch and Eurasian descent coming from Indonesia spoke Dutch, the years of internment under Japanese occupation without official schooling meant that children lagged far behind their Dutch peers regarding schoolwork. In Amsterdam, the most well-known "transitional school" for children from Indonesia was the "*Indische* HBS" (*hogere burgerschool*, a form of secondary school) on Karel Du Jardinstraat 76.[32] As we have seen, Piet Oomes attended a similar transitional school in Breda, where he struggled to catch up, failing one year and finally graduating in July 1949 at twenty-three years of age. He then found work in the Hero jam factory in Breda, working ten-hour shifts at f. 0.71 an hour [almost 9 euro today].[33] Thérèse Geerlofs, nine months younger than Piet and also without a school certificate, was offered a position at her Uncle Joop's office. She enrolled for a part-time secretarial course at the flourishing Amsterdam Institute of Schoevers in the "chic" area of Van Baerlestraat, writing: "It's not bad there at all and there are more *Indische* girls than Dutch ones and I already made acquaintance with a few."[34]

Young widow Toos Avis faced different struggles. Due to the strong devaluation of the Indonesian currency in which she was paid life insurance after the death of her husband, she needed to balance paid employment with caring for her young daughter, Mieke. On 10 March 1949 she jotted down: "Since February I am working at the Ver[eniging] Amsterdam. In the mornings it is often a rush to be at the office at nine o'clock, because I have to take you to school first." At six years old, Mieke was young enough to start her schooling in Amsterdam at a regular primary school, attending first De Hildebrandschool on Anthony van Dijckstraat, and a year later changing to the Van Loon school on Hondecoeterstraat.[35] Throughout these years, money

32 Schumacher, "Indisch Amsterdam." For a photograph of pupils of the *Indische* HBS on 22 December 1947, see https://iisg.nl/hbm/indischleven/hordijk_07.php. Despite the enormous need for these schools with the increasing number of arrivals and the serious backlog in education, the Dutch authorities soon began scaling back the number of transitional schools. By 1948 only Amsterdam, The Hague, Leiden and Utrecht still had permission to offer separate schooling to repatriates from Indonesia. Willems, *De Uittocht uit Indië 1945–1995*, 76.

33 Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek, "Prijzen toen en nu," https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/visualisaties/prijzen-toen-en-nu.

34 Katja Keuls, "Schoevers' supervrouwen veroverden de kantoorwereld," *Ons Amsterdam*, 18 January 2013, https://onsamsterdam.nl/schoevers-supervrouwen-veroverden-de-kantoorwereld; Diary of T. C. Geerlofs, entry for 8 July 1946.

35 Per chance, these two schools merged in 1974, and the new Hildebrand Van Loon school is still located in the Hondecoeterstraat (https://www.hvlschool.nl/onze-school/geschiedenis/).

remained very short, which is reflected in a remark Mieke made during a conversation recorded in her mother's diary in early May 1950: "Mother, are you going to the Scout fair on Saturday? But you will need money and you don't have that now!"[36]

Besides school and work, the selected diaries reveal the public spaces the authors visited and the entertainment they sought as part of getting to know Amsterdam. So where did the new arrivals go, and what parts of the city were their families keen to show them? Geerlofs's first outing, the day after disembarking, was the spacious Zorgvlied cemetery in the southern reaches of Amsterdam, to visit family graves. "Then we went to the Apollohal for coffee, where Mother, Aunt Hans and [my sister] Els were waiting for us."[37] The next day she noted: "In the evening, Uncle Joop had a surprise for Els and me and the three of us went to the Concertgebouw [Music Hall] and listened to a Beethoven concert, it was beautiful and so rich and I lost myself in a different world." The Concertgebouw (Van Baerlestraat, completed 1888) and the Apollohal (Apollolaan 4, completed 1934) were—and still are—major attractions and meeting points in Amsterdam, representing "old" and "new" architectural styles, respectively.[38] Oomes, too, visited these locations within days of arriving. "Sunday 17 March '46. With Joop and Gonny to the Concertgebouw orchestra. Beautiful music. Wore my new suit for the first time."[39]

Piet and Thérèse also became regulars at the now defunct Cineac, which showed newsreels and was located on Reguliersbreestraat (across from the still functioning Tuschinski Theatre). They went to the movies, visited the theatre and also several of the city's museums, including the Rijksmuseum and Scheepvaartmuseum. Piet also wrote about going to the Indisch Museum and the "colonial museum" on Linneausstraat, as well as the Artis zoo.[40] Both are in the eastern part of Amsterdam, within walking distance of his accommodation. Geerlofs met former friends from Indonesia in the streets, went dancing, took a canal trip and travelled by tram to the beach at nearby Zandvoort with her sister and a cousin, Stieneke. Unaware of the Dutch moral codes of the time, they swam and sunbathed on a stretch of beach reserved for children under fourteen. Piet liked to go swimming and visit

36 Diary of T. C. Avis-Hulstijn, entry for May 1950 (no specific date but presumably around 10 May 1950).

37 Diary of T. C. Geerlofs, entry for 25 May 1946.

38 Monumenten.nl, "Apollohal, Amsterdam," https://www.monumenten.nl/monument/527829.

39 Diary of P. A. Oomes, entry for 17 March 1946.

40 The "colonial museum" was called the Tropenmuseum between 1950 and 2023, and has since been renamed Wereldmuseum Amsterdam.

sports events, such as watching Ajax play football, and field hockey matches. His diary reveals his strong Catholic affiliation, often going to mass, as well as his love of aircraft when he cycled out to Schiphol Airport to go plane spotting. Furthermore, he regularly visited the local bathhouse, which was at the time a common activity for families who did not yet have their own bathrooms. The closest one to his accommodation at Willem Beukelsstraat was the "Schaft- en badgebouw" (Eating and bathing building) at Nirwana 3.[41] During these activities outside the home, Oomes and Geerlofs regularly bumped into people they knew from Indonesia. "Had an awful lot of fun with other boys from Indië," wrote Piet on 30 May 1946.

Finally, they both wrote about going out to cafés and restaurants, and sampling typical Dutch food such as salted raw herring. Proper "tokos" selling Indonesian food, such as Toko Dun Yong on Stormsteeg 9, were not established until the 1950s. However, several diarists mention that there were already shops that had begun to sell ingredients and products that were necessary to make dishes they used to eat in Indonesia. Here, the smell of *trassi* and *sereh* welcomed the customers. Different smells, tastes, sounds and colours are among the strongest indicators of being in a different world. And often it is precisely these sensory losses which contribute greatly to the feeling of homesickness.

Conclusion

Through their diaries and personal documents, we have traced the lives of several people who came to war-torn, subdued, physically and mentally scarred Amsterdam right after the end of the Second World War in Indonesia, as part of the first "wave" of repatriates. We focused on their encounters with the arrival structures, gave an impression of the many bureaucratic hurdles they encountered, but also of the organizations and people that came to their help. Although none of the returnees found it easy to establish a new life in Amsterdam, the city also offered opportunities. Teenagers Piet Oomes and Thérèse Geerlofs, in particular, excitedly set about discovering their new surroundings. Ultimately, their chances in life were heavily influenced by the connections they had, and by their personal, social and cultural capital. Thérèse, arriving with her parents and sister, was offered an office job by an uncle, combining this with a secretarial course at Schoevers. Piet, arriving

41 Amsterdam op de Kaart, "Schaft en Badgebouw, Nirwana 3," https://amsterdamopdekaart.nl/1850–1940/Nirwana/Schaft-_en_badgebouw.

on his own, followed a more circuitous route. He had to deal with all the bureaucracy on his own, struggled at his transitional school in Breda and eventually found a job as a factory worker. Toos Avis, a widowed single parent, faced different challenges again, juggling temporary accommodation with paid employment and the care for her young daughter, Mieke.

The experiences shared here cannot be seen as representative for the whole group of people who came to the Netherlands from Indonesia between 1945 and 1962. Many of those who arrived in one of the later waves had less connections with the Netherlands. They often came from much more mixed ethnic, social and economic backgrounds, which impacted the socio-economic and cultural capital needed to successfully resettle. Much has been written about the fact that, although these arrivals considered themselves Dutch, they were not always seen as such, and had to deal with prejudice and stigma.

What transpires from the diaries we analysed is that, despite the many difficulties the arrivals encountered in their search for ontological security, they managed to maintain hope for better times. The diaries breathe an atmosphere of optimism. This is in stark contrast with how the arrival in the Netherlands is often remembered in hindsight. In later reminiscences, disinterest and misunderstanding has almost become a topos in the memories of people returning from Indonesia. In this respect, the diaries we analysed here offer a different narrative. They demonstrate how contemporary sources may provide a more nuanced picture than retrospective memories generally give. Nevertheless, the diaries we examined only reflect a limited part of the personal experiences, and never completely describe all the experiences and feelings of the arrivals. The diarists did not, for example, write explicitly about whether they felt accepted in Amsterdam. Neither do they give us any clarity regarding their eventual sense of belonging. For that, other sources need to be consulted.

Bibliography

Literature

Bosma, Ulbe, Remco Raben and Wim Willems. *De Geschiedenis van Indische Nederlanders*. Bert Bakker, 2016.

Bossenbroek, Martin. *De Meelstreep. Terugkeer en opvang na de Tweede Wereldoorlog*. Bert Bakker, 2001.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Forms of Capital: General Sociology, Volume 3: Lectures at the Collège de France 1983–84*. Translated by Peter Collier. Polity Press, 2021.

Browning, Christopher S., and Pertti Joenniemi. "Ontological security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity." *Cooperation and Conflict* 52, no. 1 (2017): 31–47. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836716653161.

Den Hartogh, M. *Gids voor Indische repatrianten*. Nederlandsch-Indische Bond van Ex-Krijgsgevangenen en -Geïnterneerden, March 1948.

Keuls, Katja. "Schoevers' supervrouwen veroverden de kantoorwereld." *Ons Amsterdam*, 18 January 2013. https://onsamsterdam.nl/schoevers-supervrouwen-veroverden-de-kantoorwereld.

Kraak, J. H., and Nel Ploeger. *De Repatriëring uit Indonesië: Een onderzoek naar de integratie van de gerepatrieerden uit Indonesië in de Nederlandse samenleving*. Staatsdrukkerij- en Uitgeverijbedrijf, 1958.

Leidelmeijer, Margaret. *Ervaringen over de terugkeer en opvang van burgers uit NL-I in NL in de periode 1946–1952*. Ede, 6 January 2001.

Lucassen, Jan, and Leo Lucassen. *Migratie als DNA van de stad Amsterdam 1550–2021*. Atlas Contact, 2021.

Meeus, Bruno, Karel Arnaut and Bas van Heur. "Migration and the Infrastructural Politics of Urban Arrival." In *Arrival Infrastructures: Migration and Urban Social Mobilities*, edited by Bruno Meeus, Karel Arnaut and Bas van Heur. Routledge, 2019.

Molemans, Griselda. *Opgevangen in andijvielucht: De opvang van ontheemden uit Indonesië in kampen en contractpensions en de financiële claims op basis van uitgebleven rechtsherstel*, ed. Linda Crombach, 3rd ed. Quasar Books, 2019.

Repatriëringsdienst Indië. *Koers West*. Boom Ruygrok N.V., 1947.

Robinson, D. "The Neighbourhood Effects of New Immigration." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 42, no. 10 (2010): 2451–66.

Schumacher, Peter. "Indisch Amsterdam." *Java Post*, 20 November 2014. https://javapost.nl/2014/11/20/indisch-amsterdam.

Schumacher, Peter. "Indische sporen in Amsterdam." *Ons Amsterdam*, 18 October 2014. https://onsamsterdam.nl/artikelen/indische-sporen-in-amsterdam.

Wessendorf, Susanne, and Malte Gembus. "The Social Front Door: The Role of Social Infrastructures for Migrant Arrival." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50, no. 12 (2024): 2822–38. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2024.2305276.

Willems, Wim. "De gespletenheid van Tjalie Robinson." *Ons Amsterdam*, 29 September 2007. https://onsamsterdam.nl/artikelen/de-gespletenheid-van-tjalie-robinson.

Willems, Wim. *De uittocht uit Indië 1945–1995*. Bert Bakker, 2001.

Diaries and Memoirs

Diary of P. A. Oomes. NIOD 401:153.

Diary of T. C. Avis-Hulstijn. NIOD 401:161 Avis-Heelsteyn F. C. [sic].

Diary of T. C. Geerlofs. NIOD 11.33 GEE. Published as T. C. Geerlofs, *Jeugdherinneringen, Dagboeken. Semarang-Soerabaja-Amsterdam 1927–1947*. Collected by C. H. Schuckman. Pro-book.nl, 2015.
Van Thiel, Elizabeth. *P.O.W. 4036*. Typed memoirs (undated). NIOD 11.33 Thi.

Websites

https://www.monumenten.nl/monument/527829
https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/visualisaties/prijzen-toen-en-nu
https://amsterdamopdekaart.nl/1850–1940/Nirwana/Schaft-_en_badgebouw

About the Author

Dr **Eveline Buchheim** is senior researcher at NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies. She was trained as an anthropologist and publishes on gender, (post)colonialism, war, memory studies and psychiatry.

Dr **Ernestine Hoegen** is an independent author, translator and editor. She has a background in law and publishes on life writing from Japanese internment camps. Her most recent book (with Pamela Guldie) is a novel about the Dutch judiciary.

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

7. Art, Love, Freedom: The Amsterdam Diaries of Işık Tüzüner

Irem Burcu Özkan Hoeijmakers and Laura van Hasselt

Abstract: Turkish-born artist Işık Tüzüner (b. 1954) moved to Amsterdam in 1975 after falling in love with a Dutchman. She has donated twenty trilingual (Turkish–English–Dutch) diaries to Atria and shared eleven more with researchers, supplemented by two interviews. Central to this chapter are Tüzüner's experiences as a migrant artist in Amsterdam, both in relation to her self-image and her image of the city. Using Gabriele Rippl's framework, her identity reflects both an "in-between migrant" and a "cosmopolitan traveller," but, ultimately, she defines herself as an Amsterdammer. While maintaining ties to her Turkish heritage, she embraces Amsterdam's liberal atmosphere, shaping her artistic and personal identity. Despite moments of displacement, she finds belonging in a city she associates with art, love and freedom.

Keywords: migrant; artist; sculpture; Turkey; cosmopolitan; twentieth century

"Işık Tüzüner, the diary writer"[1]

Diaries are among the most intimate objects that we own. Like the variety of our inner worlds, our diaries can also exist in many forms. After all, "it is very difficult to say anything about diaries, which is true for all of them."[2] Some consist of written entries only, others are decorated with drawings, photos or clippings. For some, diary writing is a sort of literary

1 "Günlük yazarı Işık Tüzüner." Diary of Işık Tüzüner 2009B, personal archive Tüzüner.

2 Eckhard Kuhn-Osius, "Making Loose Ends Meet: Private Journals in the Public Realm," *The German Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (1981): 166.

Rensen, Marleen, Leonieke Vermeer, Laura van Hasselt and Ernestine Hoegen, eds. *Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity: Urban Lives*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2025.
DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-7

Fig. 7.1. Işık Tüzüner at her exam exhibition. Rietveld Academy, 1979, Amsterdam. Exhibited artworks: *To Concentrate* (sculpture) and *Tamam* (on the wall).
photo: Tony Andreas

activity, and others use their diaries as nothing more than a simple tool of daily reflection.[3] And some others, like Işık Tüzüner, do everything all at once.

From 1980 until the present, Işık has irregularly kept expressive, trilingual diaries about her life as an independent artist in Amsterdam. Over the years, she has donated twenty of these to the Atria Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History.[4] Our chapter is based on this diverse collection of egodocuments, supplemented with eleven diaries which are still in Tüzüner's

3 Cinthia Gannet, *Gender and the Journal: Diaries and Academic Discourse* (State University of New York Press, 1992), 99.

4 Atria EGO 192; Biographical file: 4749.

personal archive and two interviews.[5] We aim to explore the experiences of Işık Tüzüner as a migrant artist in Amsterdam, both in relation to her self-image and her image of the city. In the *Handbook of Autobiography*, Gabriele Rippl distinguished two recurring main themes in the self-construction of the migrant's identity: either the "immigrant struggling with an in-between identity" or the "sophisticated cosmopolitan traveller at ease around the globe."[6] Does Turkish-Amsterdammer Işık Tüzüner fit into either of these categories, and how does she portray herself in relation to the city she has chosen to live in?

Flipping through Işık's diaries is a stimulating experience as you never know what to expect on the next page. It may be an entry written in three different languages on one page, a drawing, a letter to a dear friend, a newspaper clipping or an old picture of her—directly looking into your eyes. In general, each diary is assumed to contain more than one genre;[7] when it comes to Işık's case, one can lose count. When we met with Işık for two different interviews, we associated her with her colourful diaries at first sight. Everything she does is a form of artistic expression.

Artist without Borders

"Amsterdam is the city I love. I left my life in Istanbul to come here for happiness."[8] This is a recurring sentence in Işık's diaries. Her Amsterdam life started in 1975. This was in the middle of a period of mass migration from Turkey to the Netherlands and other Western European countries. Yet Işık is incomparable to the thousands of men who came to Amsterdam in the 1960s and 1970s as so-called "guest workers," many of whom lived in the barracks of "Camp Atatürk" in the northern, industrial area of the city.[9]

5 Interviews held by Özkan and Van Hasselt at Arti et Amicitiae, Amsterdam, 8 December 2023 and 13 February 2024.

6 Gabriele Rippl, "Autobiography in the Globalised World," in *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, ed. Martina Wagner-Edelgraaf (De Gruyter, 2019), 1270.

7 Rebecca Hogan, "Engendered Autobiographies: The Diary as a Feminine Form," *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism* 14, no. 2 (1991): 97.

8 "Amsterdam sevdiğim şehirdir. İstanbul'daki yaşantımı bırakıp buraya geldim mutluluk için." Personal archive, 2011.

9 Laura van Hasselt and Vinnie van der Linde, "Hoe woonden de eerste gastarbeiders?" *Ons Amsterdam* (2011): 450–51; Erhan Tuskan and Jaap Vogel, *Lied uit den Vreemde. Brieven en foto's van Turkse migranten 1964–1975* (Aksant, 2004), 116–25. Initially, nearly all "guest workers" in the Netherlands were men, but after the 1974 law of family reunification, many women and children joined them.

She was an artist—and still is at the time of writing. As a female artist from Turkey, she was an "exotic" novelty in 1970s Amsterdam.[10]

Işık Tüzüner was born in 1954 in Gölcük, a rural district in the northern part of Turkey. Her father was a lawyer at the local tax authorities. Her mother was an artist and a teacher: Ayhan Öner taught drawing at a training college for girls, of which she eventually became the director. When Işık was eleven years old the family moved to Istanbul.[11] In 1971 she followed in her mother's footsteps by joining the Istanbul Academy of Fine Arts, where she specialized in sculpture. Despite partaking in a sculpture exhibition at the Istanbul Festival in 1975, she did not complete her studies there, because she suddenly decided to move to Amsterdam.

When asked why, her answer is simple: "This is a love story."[12] Işık was nineteen years old, when she met a young Dutchman in Istanbul: Jan van Rooij. The adventurous dental student had driven all the way from Holland on his motorcycle. He swept her off her feet. Having seen her at work in the Istanbul Art Academy, he persuaded her to follow him back to Amsterdam and to apply to the Rietveld Academy. Işık did not hesitate and sold her works to pay for a two-day train ticket to the Netherlands. It was a risky decision with far-reaching consequences. Looking back, she says: "I left my country, my friends, my family, all." But she doesn't show any regrets, on the contrary: she felt liberated. Nearly half a century later she proudly recalls: "I told them: I'm going my own way."[13]

The impulsive move to Amsterdam was a huge gamble. But her talent was recognized and she was indeed admitted to the renowned Rietveld Academy. The atmosphere was very different from the more traditional education at the Turkish art schools.[14] The Amsterdam art academy was a breeding ground for unconventional artists. In the late 1970s, when Işık studied at the Rietveld Academy, it served as a meeting place for what was to become the "Nieuwe Wilden" movement (Young Wild Ones). The group included young artists such as Peter Klashorst, Rob Scholte and Sandra Derks, who were to become popular in the 1980s.[15] Although Işık was never

10 The first student from Turkey to attend a Dutch art academy was Esma Yigitoglu, in 1961 in Rotterdam. Rosemarie Buikema and Maaike Meijer, *Kunsten in beweging. Cultuur en migratie in Nederland 1980–2000* (SDU, 2004), 99.

11 Tjaal Aeckerlin and Rachma el Kouaa, *Een koffer vol herinneringen. 38 portretten van vertellers uit 38 landen* (Stichting Welzijn Zeeburg, 2012), 54–56.

12 Interview with Işık Tüzüner, 8 December 2023, 00:12:53.

13 Ibid., 00:14:24.

14 Buikema and Meijer, *Kunsten in beweging*, 99–100.

15 Amanda Wasielewski, *From City Space to Cyberspace: Art, Squatting, and Internet Culture in the Netherlands* (Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 77.

formally part of this or any other artistic movement, her work is related to the neo-expressionism of these Dutch artists. Her career was off to a successful start. Her first exhibition was at Amstelpark in 1978, when she was still a student.

The Amsterdam art academy did not only bring artistic inspiration. Işık fell in love with her sculpture teacher, Tony Andreas (1944–2019).[16] The relationship with Jan had not lasted. There were to be many more men in her life, but sculptor Tony was her greatest love. Looking back, she fondly calls him a "beatnik," after the American cult writer Jack Kerouac.[17] They shared a hippie, non-materialistic way of life. He was ten years her senior, had a great network and helped her find her way in the Dutch art world. They got married in 1976 and lived and worked together first in an artist building complex in the Red-Light District and then in a studio at Prinsengracht 469, until their divorce in 1989.[18]

She graduated in 1979 and a year later she participated in a group exhibition of female artists at the Museum Fodor in Amsterdam and the Bonnefantenmuseum Maastricht (*1+1=11*). In the same year, she received a grant to study at the renowned St Martin's School of Art and Chelsea School of Art, both in London. She came back to Amsterdam in 1981 and became a part-time teacher at the Royal Academy in Den Bosch and the Rietveld Academy. Teaching provided her with a small but steady income and left her enough time to work on her own art projects. Her work, which was related to constructivism and minimal art, was popular with the institutions. From the mid-1980s Işık started making colourful sculptures out of waste material. She first used the term "urban art" and in the 1990s the term "post art," to criticize consumer society in general and the commercial art world in particular. Her works were acquired by major Dutch art museums, such as the Kröller Müller, the Haags Gemeentemuseum (now the Kunstmuseum) and the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.[19] She also had works exhibited in Istanbul and in Belgium.

Işık recalls that she was often framed as an "*allochtoon*," as foreigners of all kinds were called in the Netherlands until recently. The word, which derives from Greek, literally means "coming from different soil." Işık, like

16 His name lives on in the Tony Andreas Fund, which financially supports young artists in pursuing education abroad in the field of spatial and three-dimensional art.

17 Interview with Işık Tüzüner, 8 December 2023, 00:17:42.

18 "İnanmayacaksın ama buradaki yaşam Türkiyedekinden farklı değil. Herkes nerede olursa olsun zevklerin, mutluluğun ve her şeyin bedelini ödemek zorunluluğunda." Personal archive, 1980.

19 Buikema and Meijer, *Kunsten in beweging*, 107–8.

many other artists, has always been ambivalent about this division between Dutch "natives" ("*autochtonen*") and immigrants. On the one hand, to be classified an "*allochtoon*" could help to acquire specific grants or exhibition possibilities. On the other hand, the label "*allochtoon*" was often seen as an unwanted mark of "otherness," of being valued for the wrong reasons, of not *really* belonging. Işık wanted to be seen as an international artist, not as a specifically non-Western one.

In an interview in 1991 she claimed: "I'm Turkish. But I don't make Turkish art." At the same time, she acknowledged that her Turkish roots were visible in her art: "Of course the exotic of my images does have to do with my background. But that also goes for the spiritual, the poetic, the mystical."[20] Işık creates different aspects of life for herself and this includes her identity: "I am both Turkish and Dutch. You build your own identity; you make it yours."[21] She becomes upset when the identity she constructs does not correspond to the identity the outside world sometimes assigns her. During our interview, she gave an example of this: "They said to me, I was really disappointed, I won't be in the group of international artists but *allochtonen*. I said, what are you talking about? I am trying to be an international artist." In her diary she wrote: "I keep existing in the Netherlands as a Turkish artist."[22]

In 1991 she had a solo exhibition at De Librije in Zwolle, titled *Kunst moet positief zijn* (Art has to be positive). In reviews her works were described as just that: positive, colourful and exuberant.[23] But Tüzüner's work was not solely positive. One of the reasons she started to work with painted cardboard boxes was to criticize the Dutch habit of classifying everyone in a specific box, in her case labelled "*allochtoon*." In a typical combination of Dutch and English she explains: "Holland is *een hokjescultuur*. Everybody has been in somewhere *hokje*" [sic].[24] This way of pigeonholing was in sharp contrast with the freedom she had always associated with Amsterdam. For instance: "I love living in Amsterdam, I love being free."[25] One page in her 1991 diary stands out. In big letters, there is only one word, written twice: "Özgürlük, Özgürlük" ("Freedom, Freedom").[26]

20 Ed Wingen, "Işık Tüzüner: "Kunst moet positief zijn," *De Telegraaf*, 16 August 1991, T15.

21 "Ben Türk gibi ve Hollandalı. Kendine göre kimlik oluşturuyorsun, alıp kendine mal edeceksin." Personal archive, 2000.

22 "Türk sanatçı olarak Hollanda'da varlığımı sürdürüyorum.' Personal archive, 2009A.

23 E.g. Janneke Wesseling, "Karton met 'positieve' boodschap," *NRC Handelsblad*, 6 August 1991, 6.

24 Interview with Işık Tüzüner, 8 December 2023, 00:11:20.

25 "Amsterdam'da yaşamayı ve özgür olmayı seviyorum." Personal archive, 1998–2000.

26 Personal archive, 1989–2008.

Işık's Concept of a Diary

People have different reasons for keeping a diary. During our first interview with Işık, one of our first questions was about her motivation to write one. She first mentions the benefit of scheduling. "I was a very active artist," she says.[27] Moreover, she also confirms that she sees it as a "way to communicate to the world, like her art," and ultimately as "a form of art."[28]

Keeping a diary is one thing; donating it is of a completely different order. When the diaries are donated to an open archive, their ownership is shared with a "semi-public realm."[29] It is not a common practice, considering that usually, even the family members of the diary writer are not aware of the existence of a diary.[30] We were very curious about her motivation for donating her diaries to the ATRIA archive. Her answer to that question was inspiring: "I want to leave [the diaries] behind for the new generations."[31] This shows that diary writing is not a solely individual act for Işık, but it is tied strongly to a wish for a societal impact. She wants to be known not just for her art but also for her everyday life and her way of living. Which, in her case, is inseparable from her artistic expression. As she proudly says: "I am an action artist."[32] Neither the diaries donated to ATRIA nor those from her personal archive seem auto-censored either—which is not unusual especially historically in the genre of women's diaries.[33]

One of the most striking features of Işık's diaries is the multilingual character of the writings. She writes in three languages: Turkish, Dutch and English. Most of it is written in Turkish; however, the frequency of switching between the languages is fascinating. We kept tracing the switches while going through the diaries and asked her about it. She did not give a conclusive answer to our question and admitted that these were old diaries and she did not remember why she switched between languages.[34] From

27 Interview with Işık Tüzüner, 8 December 2023, 00:06:06.

28 Ibid., 00:08:06.

29 Suzanne L. Bunkers, "Whose Diary Is It Anyway?: Issues of Agency, Authority, Ownership," *Auto/Biography Studies* 17, no. 1 (2014): 12.

30 Philippe Lejeune and Catherine Bogaert, "The Practice of Writing a Diary," trans. Dagmara Meijers-Troller, in *The Diary: The Epic of Everyday Life*, ed. Batsheva Ben-Amos and Dan Ben-Amos (Indiana University Press, 2020), 25.

31 Interview with Işık Tüzüner, 8 December 2023, 00:01:42.

32 Ibid., 00:33:49.

33 Kathryn Carter, "Feminist Interpretations of the Diary," in *The Diary: The Epic of Everyday Life*, ed. Batsheva Ben-Amos and Dan Ben-Amos (Indiana University Press, 2020), 40.

34 Interview with Işık Tüzüner, 13 February 2024, 08:39–08:43.

her answers, we can draw two different conclusions: either there is no real pattern, or there is an unconscious one.

Işık says she reads back her diaries every day. "Questions in the mind, I go back."[35] This shows that she interacts with her diaries rather than just leaving them in a corner of the past. Like most diary writers, Işık is one of her own future readers.[36] She is looking back at them to seek answers to today's questions. This sounds like an excellent way to create consistency between the past and current selves.[37]

After reviewing her writing habits and her perspective on herself as a diary writer, it is time to examine the diaries' content more closely. Once you flip through Işık's diaries, the most frequent emotion you encounter would be "gratitude." This may sound surprising, as for many diary writers, the motivation to write usually comes from darker, more melancholic thoughts and feelings. Not for Işık. Her diaries mostly reflect happiness, good memories, health, joy and gratitude. She is grateful for many different things, her place in the Jordaan being one of those. She regularly mentions the neighbourhood and her own place there as details that give her joy and peace. The following quotes show us the way she shows gratitude for the neighbourhood she lives in:

> I am grateful that I woke up healthy in my home in Jordaan. This sunny day makes me happy; the Autumn sun shines bright.[38]

> I woke up feeling energetic today. I am alive, I am healthy, I do fine. I love people. I love the neighbourhood I live in.[39]

These quotes show that the simple fact of living in the Jordaan neighbourhood makes her happy. She finds joy in living where she lives, and she reflects on this frequently in her diaries and throughout the decades. Jordaan sounds like a happy constant in Işık's life.

Another regular gratitude element in Işık's diaries is her art. She finds joy not just in the product but also in existing as an artist. Being an

35 Interview with Işık Tüzüner, 8 December 2023, 00:40:47.

36 Lejeune and Bogaert, "The Practice of Writing a Diary," 29.

37 Irina Paperno, "What Can Be Done with Diaries?," *The Russian Review* 63, no. 4 (2004): 571–72.

38 "Şükrediyorum ki Jordaan'daki evimde sağlıkla güzel uyandım. Bu güneşli hava içimde mutluluk yaratıyor, sonbaharın güneşi de ayrı parlıyor." Personal archive, 2009A.

39 "Bu sabah canla başla kalktım. Yaşıyorum sıhhatliyim iyiyim. İnsanlara karşı sevgilerim var. Yaşadığım muhiti seviyorum." Personal archive, 2009A.

Amsterdam-based artist seems almost equally essential to her. The following quotes show how appreciative she is for all this:

> I have a studio and a place to live in Amsterdam Hazenstraat. This is a privilege.[40]

> If we can exist as artists in this Dutch society, if we can continue producing our art, if we can help others even, if we are grateful for our good health, if we are full of love, and if we can share this, lucky us.[41]

> Museum accepting my work gave me confidence. I told everyone. It would be nice if one or a couple of my works were accepted every year.[42]

> The exhibition at Arti has started. The opening was lovely. Being or feeling like the special person is a nice feeling.[43]

One other constant source of gratitude for Işık is actually the way she lives her life. She is comfortable in her skin. She writes often how happy she is as she is. Even if she wrote some of these as affirmations, the following quotes make a fact evident: she lives life as seriously as she makes her art. She praised the first day of 2007 as:

> Hooray inspiration, *actie* [action], movement, resistance, strength, balance, spontaneousness, freedom, challenge, and provocation.[44]

> My cardigan, my comfortable clothes. My life in Europe. My own place, my home. I have the strength to manage all.[45]

40 "Amsterdam'da Hazen straat'ta evim de atölyem de var. Bu bir ayrıcalık." Atria, EGO/192, 2009/5.

41 "Bu Hollanda toplumunda yabancı sanatçı olarak var olabiliyorsak, sanatımızı devam ettiriyorsak, hatta başkalarına da yardımcı olabiliyorsak, sağlığımızın yerinde olduğuna şükrediyorsak, sevgiyle doluysak, bunu paylaşabiliyorsak ne mutlu bize." Atria, EGO/192, 2005–6/2.

42 "Bu ara müzeye işimin alınması bana güven verdi. Herkese anlattım. İşte böyle her sene bir iş birkaç iş alınsa iyi olur." Personal archive, 1998–2000.

43 "Arti'deki sergi açıldı. Hoştu. Yani özel kişi olmak öyle hissetmek çok güzel bir his." Personal archive, 1998–2000.

44 "Yaşasın ilham, actie, eylem. Yaşayan ilham, eylem, direnmek, direnç, dengeli hareket, spontane oluş, dirençlilik, özgür, bağsız, meydan okuyucu, provokatör." Atria, EGO/192, 2005/1.

45 "Kendi hırkam kendi rahat giysilerim. Avrupa yaşantım. Kendi yerim ve evim. Hepsini idare edebilecek gücüm var." Atria, EGO/192, 2008/4.

> My whole aim with all these exhibitions, letters, the work and all is for creating new worlds. Humans transform. The freedom of transforming the environment that we take part in. Adding something from yourself. The wish to create a new and free world.[46]

One of the strongest statements she wrote in all these diaries is written on the back of a receipt: "I confess that I live."[47] This short and striking sentence echoes well with this Irina Paperno quote: "As it turns life into text, the diary represents a lasting trace of one's being—an effective defense against annihilation."[48]

If you keep flipping the pages, you see some sadness in the diaries as well. However, these instances are much less frequent than the happy ones. The following selection shows somewhat melancholic moments of reflection. Most of these statements include elements of solitude, foreignness, nostalgia and loss. On one of the days she met with Tony after their divorce, she wrote:

> I came home and cried. I cried in despair. I cried for being lonely, having so few friends, managing everything alone in the Netherlands, for existence in two countries, for fears, loneliness, lovelessness, all the hustle, being a lonely woman in business life, fatigue, exhaustion. I cried for a long time.[49]

We stumble upon memories of loved ones who passed away:

> My mother, Nurser, Esma all took off after living this life. We will, too.[50]

And it is sometimes simply melancholic:

> One longs for the light during the dark, autumn days of Europe, while the winter is closing and people start preparing for Christmas and New Year's.[51]

46 "Benim bütün çabam bu kadar sergiler, mektuplaşmalar, iş veya özel yarattığım yeni dünyalardır. İnsan dönüştürür. Girdiği çevreyi dönüştürme özgürlüğü. Kendinden bir şey koyma. Özgür ve yeni bir dünya kurma arzusu.' Personal archive, 2005.

47 "Yaşadığımı itiraf ediyorum." Personal archive, 98–2000.

48 Paperno, "What Can Be Done with Diaries?," 563.

49 "Eve geldim hep ağladım. Ümitsizdim ağladım. Ağladım yalnızlığıma, dostumun çok az olduğuna, Hollanda'da işleri kendimin yürütebildiğime, iki ülkedeki var oluş, korkular, yalnızlık, aşksızlık, yine işlerle uğraşmak, yalnız iş kadını olmak, yorgunluk, bitkinlik. Ağlama uzun sürdü." Atria, EGO/192, 2009/5.

50 "Annem, Nurser, Esma gittiler yaşayıp. Biz de gideceğiz." Atria, EGO/192, 2009/5.

51 "Avrupanın kışa yaklaşan, Christmas, yeni yıl hazırlıklarının yapıldığı karanlık sonbahar günlerinde insan aydınlığı arıyor." Personal archive, 2009A.

As much as she loved life in Amsterdam, she missed her homeland, especially during winter. From her 1980 diary:

> I have been dreaming about summer during the cold, lonely, dark days of winter. Turkey is a constant longing inside—with the memories, the nature, the sun.[52]

City of Freedom

In a sense, keeping a diary is a natural need for migrants. When all of one's routines are upset, keeping a personal record can help dealing with the deluge of otherness. That is, provided one has the time and the means to do so. According to literary scholar Andrew Hassam, migrants' diaries are "attempts to give a readable form to the literally unsettling experience of migration."[53] This notion is especially relevant to the history of a city like Amsterdam, which was built on migration. Migration, as social historians Jan and Leo Lucassen claim, is no less than the DNA of the Dutch capital.[54] Yet there are few migrants' diaries to be found in the Amsterdam archives, making the daily, personal lives of migrants elusive to urban historians. Işık's diary collection is a valuable exception, all the more so because the diarist is still there to be interviewed.

"My home is Amsterdam and Turkey," writes Işık in 2009.[55] It is no coincidence that she mentions Amsterdam instead of the Netherlands. When asked if she sees a difference between the two, she immediately says yes. "*Vrijheid blijheid*—it is Amsterdam."[56] This famous Dutch expression ("Freedom [is] happiness") touches the core of Işık's ideal of Amsterdam. Artistic freedom, sexual freedom, freedom to live her life without any restraints—that is what she has always sought and often found in Amsterdam. Her diaries are highly personal, yet in this sense they reflect an image of the city which was widely shared since the late 1960s. In his popular history of Amsterdam, the American historian Russell Shorto labelled it "the most liberal city in the world."[57] Although this reputation has come under increasing pressure in the

52 "Kışın soğuk, yalnız, karanlık günlerinde yaz hayalleri kurdum. Türkiye insanın içinde daima yanan özlem oluyor. Hatıralarıyla, tabiat güzelliğiyle, güneşiyle." Personal archive, 1980.

53 Andrew Hassam, *Sailing to Australia: Shipboard Diaries by Nineteenth-Century British Migrants* (Melbourne University Press, 1995), 2–4.

54 Jan and Leo Lucassen, *Migratie als DNA van Amsterdam 1550–2021* (Atlas Contact, 2021).

55 'Evim Türkiye ve Amsterdam dı." Atria, EGO/192, 2009/6.

56 Interview with Işık Tüzüner, 8 December 2023, 01:04:48.

57 Russell Shorto, *Amsterdam: A History of the World's Most Liberal City* (Doubleday, 2013).

last decade, it was very much alive in 1975, when Işık came to Amsterdam. The aura of freedom attracted many other young people to Amsterdam in the late 1960s and in the 1970s.

This idealized image of the city originated around 1965, when the anarchist Provo youth movement started challenging the Amsterdam authorities with playful, mediagenic provocations.[58] As historian James Kennedy has persuasively argued, the following decade of rapid democratization and emancipation in the Netherlands may have been more due to the accommodating attitude of those in power than to the successful activism of young anarchists and reformers.[59] However, Amsterdam was undoubtedly the centre of all sorts of freedom movements, with its legal coffee shops, feminist demonstrations, hippies from all over the world and experimental musical and cultural scene. It was not all love and peace though: in 1975, the year Işık came to Amsterdam, Nieuwmarkt was the site of serious squatter riots.[60]

Her first place in Amsterdam was a student room with Jan, on the Uilenstede campus in the south. In 1976 she moved in with Tony at the Oudezijds Achterburgwal in the central Red-Light District. After eight years they moved to a classier neighbourhood, Prinsengracht. Nowadays, the houses located along Amsterdam's canals are some of the city's most expensive residences, but in the 1980s many of these centuries-old buildings were dilapidated and many were squats. In her diary from 2005–6, she wrote:

> Tony's Amsterdam. Feeling like I am here for him. There is an Amsterdam he introduced to me. Neighbourhoods, places, streets that we have mutual memories in. But I improved this Amsterdam.[61]

This last, self-assured sentence is important. Tony may have been her guide to the city in the beginning, but eventually she became her own "Captain Işık."[62] She felt very sad when with the break-up she did not only lose her husband, but also their shared studio at the Prinsengracht.

> Tony said he would take down the name board. There will no longer be an "Işık Tüzüner–Tony Andreas" board. I will no longer have a Prinsengracht board in Amsterdam.[63]

58 Niek Pas, *Imaazje! De verbeelding van Provo 1965–1967* (Wereldbibliotheek, 2003).

59 James Kennedy, *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw. Nederland in de jaren zestig* (Boom, 1995).

60 Doeko Bosscher, "Na de storm geen stilte," in *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam. Tweestrijd om de hoofdstad 1900–2000*, ed. P. de Rooy (SUN, 2007), 332–33.

61 Atria, EGO/192, 2005–2006/2.

62 One of her diaries is titled *Kapitein Işık's Logboek*. Personal archive, 2004–12.

63 Atria, EGO/192, 2009/6.

But she also valued her new independence. In 1992 she found a new home in Hazenstraat, in Jordaan. Işık often refers to the area in her diaries, always in a positive sense. In the 1970s the old Jordaan area had changed from a monocultural residential area into a multicultural, artistic part of the city which was valued for its freedom and unconventional lifestyles.[64] Even though she frequents many places elsewhere in the city, this is the neighbourhood where she feels most at home. As she notes down in Turkish in her 2009 diary:

> I am home. A morning in Jordaan, a sunny morning, the last sunbeams of the sun are scattering around and making Jordaan more beautiful.

A few pages on, in the same diary, again in Turkish: "I sat in my beautiful window corner in my small room and watched Jordaan."[65] She loves looking out of the window and watching the people walking or cycling past, through the narrow streets of the old quarter. Lauriergracht and Brouwersgracht, at the northern edge of the Jordaan, often feature in her diaries, as does the Suzanne Biederberg Gallery on Oudezijds Voorburgwal 223, where she had many solo exhibitions.

But her life has never been confined to this part of town. With the help of Tony, she found a new studio in 1992 at Nieuwe Teertuinen 17, north of Jordaan (she stayed there until 2013). This is where she opened her own "Passion Art Museum," which she continued online as "Passion TV."[66] One of her favourite pubs is Festina Lente at Looiersgracht, in the heart of Jordaan. She also frequents cafés and concert halls in other parts of Amsterdam, such as De Sputnik Noord, Paradiso and Melkweg. Rock music plays an important role in her life:

> Last night I went to a rock concert at Melkweg. Karma [to] burn, Monster Magnet. It is a privilege to go to a concert on a beautiful day. I love the living city Amsterdam. It makes me happy to take part in its activities. Its narrow streets, rock concerts, little stores make me happy.[67]

64 Tim Verlaan and Aimée Albers, "From Hippies to Yuppies: Marginal Gentrification in Amsterdam's Jordaan and De Pijp Neighbourhoods 1960–1990," *City* 26, no. 2–3 (2022): 502–9.

65 "Güzel cam kenarında oturdum ufak odamda, Jordaan'ı seyrettim." Personal archive, 2009A.

66 "PassionTV! Işık Tüzüner, 1e aflevering (Nederlands)," YouTube, https://youtu.be/8PgRQXa38GU?si=S7cygKxbm-HGlhtS.

67 "Dün gece Melkweg'te rock konserine gittim. Güzel bir yaz gününde konsere gitmek bir ayrıcalıktır. Amsterdam'ın yaşayan rock hayatı. Bu aektivitelerde kendimin de bulunmas beni mutlu ediyor. Amsterdam'ın ufak sokakları, butikleri ve konserleri beni mutlu ediyor." Personal archive, 1990–2008.

The Artists' association Arti et Amicitiae at Rokin also became an important place for her. The longer she lived in Amsterdam, the more the city featured in her work. In 2008 she wrote in her diary: "Amsterdam has been my muse nowadays."[68]

She loves being a local: "I can say that I know Amsterdam very well. It reminds jazz to me [sic]." But feeling at home in Amsterdam is not the same as feeling fully accepted in Dutch society. She remains keenly aware of being seen as a foreigner:

> It is nice that a Dutch artist calls a Turkish one. Not many artists call. I suddenly felt Turkish. There is a foreignness.

To complicate matters, when she visits family and friends in Turkey, she sometimes feels like a foreigner as well. As she wrote in a letter to her friend Nurser: "I am no longer bothered by belonging to two countries. But I don't want to feel weird while in Turkey." There is a sense of not quite belonging in either country. But Işık usually sees her multiple identities as a strength. In 2008 she quite literally gave both cities a place in her home, by setting up two flowerpots: "I named one pot Istanbul and the other Amsterdam. I gave them city names and planted flowers."[69] She feels happy in their midst.

Usually, she was proud to reconcile her Turkish and Amsterdam identities. But in a rare, sad fragment in her 1980 diary, she wrote: "You won't believe but the life here is not very different than the one in Turkey. Wherever you are, you need to pay the price for the pleasures, happiness and everything else."[70]

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined Isık Tüzüner's Amsterdam diaries from the Atria archive and from her personal archive. Based on these twenty-one notebooks and two interviews, we have explored her experiences as a migrant artist in Amsterdam since 1975. The question we set out to answer was, "How does she portray herself in her diaries in relation to the city she has chosen to live in?" While exploring this question, we tried to analyse

68 "Bu ara Amsterdam ilham kaynağı oldu benim için." Personal archive, 2008.

69 "Bir saksı İstanbul, bir saksı Amsterdam. Şehir adları koydum ektim." Personal archive, 2008.

70 "İnanmayacaksın ama buradaki yaşam Türkiyedekinden farklı değil. Herkes nerede olursa olsun zevklerin, mutluluğun ve her şeyin bedelini ödemek zorunluluğunda." Personal archive, 1980.

how Işık as a diary writer fits in with Rippl's two main themes in the self-construction of the migrant's identity.

Rippl distinguishes between the "immigrant struggling with an in-between identity" and the "sophisticated cosmopolitan traveller at ease around the globe." While Işık's diaries show elements of both, we propose that they fall into a third category: that of the migrant who reconciles two national identities by merging them into a local one. On the one hand she feels Turkish, on the other not Dutch but an Amsterdammer. After so many years in the Netherlands, Işık feels regarded as a foreigner when she is back in Turkey. She certainly does not feel very Dutch, wherever she is. But there is one place where she feels deeply at home and that is in the city where she lives: Amsterdam. Whatever flaws it may have, Amsterdam is where she belongs. It is no coincidence that she decided to donate her diaries to an archive based in Amsterdam. As has become evident from several quotes in her diaries, Işık has regularly struggled with an in-between identity like many other migrants. However, according to her diaries she never did so to the point of despair. There have certainly been moments of frustration about not belonging, but these moments do not define her. More often, she has thoroughly enjoyed the combination of coming from Turkey and living as a local in Amsterdam. She emphatically does not want to be seen as an *allochtoon*, someone whose identity is defined by being a foreigner. She portrays herself as an international artist, who has consciously chosen to live and work in Amsterdam.[71] In that sense, the self-construction of her identity would fit more into Rippl's second category: "the sophisticated cosmopolitan traveler at ease around the globe." Yet she is not a typical cosmopolitan who travels the world. Except for her one year as a student in London and a few exhibitions elsewhere in Europe, her focus has very much remained on the Netherlands, specifically on Amsterdam. Thus, the term "cosmopolitan traveller" does not quite fit her self-image either. But the term "Amsterdammer" does.

In one of the interviews, she characterized Amsterdam as *Vrijheid blijheid*—Freedom [is] happiness. Here her sense of the city and of herself overlap, for this is not just a characterization of her ideal Amsterdam, but also of herself as an artist and a human being. It is Amsterdam's reputation as one of the most liberal cities in the world that has always attracted her, ever since she first came here as a hippie in 1975. Even though the city's cultural climate has drastically changed in the last decades, Amsterdam

71 This self-image is confirmed in a photobook on Amsterdammers, *World Citizens en Route*. Işık is photographed next to visual artist Bülent Evren, also a migrant from Turkey. Marian Borsjes, *Wereldburgers onderweg* (self-published, 2024), 133.

is still her ultimate city of freedom. Even if this is no more than an ideal image, it is this ideal that makes her feel at home in Amsterdam. We asked Işık, during one of the interviews, if she travelled back in time and found herself in 1975, would she make the same choice of leaving everything and everyone behind to come to Amsterdam? "Yes," she says, without hesitation.[72]

Bibliography

Sources

Diary of Işık Tüzüner. Atria EGO/192.

Diary of Işık Tüzüner. Personal archive of Işık Tüzüner.

Tüzüner, Işık. Atria Biographical File 4749.

Tüzüner, Işık. Interview by Irem Burcu Özkan Hoeijmakers and Laura van Hasselt, 8 December 2023.

Tüzüner, Işık. Interview by Irem Burcu Özkan Hoeijmakers and Laura van Hasselt, 2 February 2024.

Literature

Aeckerlin, Tjaal, and Rachma el Kouaa. *Een koffer vol herinneringen. 38 portretten van vertellers uit 38 landen*. Stichting Welzijn Zeeburg, 2002.

Borsjes, Marian. *Wereldburgers onderweg*. Published by the author, 2024.

Bosscher, Doeko. "Na de storm geen stilte." In *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam. Tweestrijd om de hoofdstad 1900–2000*, edited by P. de Rooy. SUN, 2007.

Buikema, Rosemarie, and Maaike Meijer. *Kunsten in beweging. Cultuur en Migratie in Nederland 1980–2000*. Sdu, 2004.

Bunkers, Suzanne L. "Whose Diary Is It Anyway? Issues of Agency, Authority, Ownership." *Auto/Biography Studies* 17, no: 1 (2014): 11–17.

Carter, Kathryn. "Feminist Interpretations of the Diary." In *The Diary: The Epic of Everyday Life*, edited by Batsheva Ben-Amos and Dan Ben-Amos, 39–57. Indiana University Press, 2020.

Gannet, Cinthia. *Gender and the Journal: Diaries and Academic Discourse*. State University of New York Press, 1992.

Hassam, Andrew. *Sailing to Australia: Shipboard Diaries by Nineteenth-Century British Migrants*. Melbourne University Press, 1995.

Hogan, Rebecca. "Engendered Autobiographies: The Diary as a Feminine Form." *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism* 14, no. 2 (1991): 95–107.

Kennedy, James. *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw. Nederland in de jaren zestig*. Boom, 1995.

72 Interview with Işık Tüzüner, 8 December 2023, 01:05:55.

Kuhn-Osius, Eckhard. "Making Loose Ends Meet: Private Journals in the Public Realm." *The German Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (1981): 166–76.

Lejeune, Philippe, and Catherine Bogaert. "The Practice of Writing a Diary." Translated by Dagmara Meijers-Troller. In *The Diary: The Epic of Everyday Life*, edited by Batsheva Ben-Amos and Dan Ben-Amos, 25–38. Indiana University Press, 2020.

Lucassen, Jan, and Leo Lucassen. *Migratie als DNA van Amsterdam. 1550–2021.* Atlas Contact, 2021.

Paperno, Irina. "What Can Be Done with Diaries?" *The Russian Review* 63, no. 4 (2004): 561–73.

Pas, Niek. *Imaazje! De verbeelding van Provo 1965–1967.* Wereldbibliotheek, 2003.

Rippl, Gabriele. "Autobiography in the Globalised World." In *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, edited by Martina Wagner-Edelgraaf, 1263–80. De Gruyter, 2019.

Shorto, Russell. *Amsterdam: A History of the World's Most Liberal City.* Doubleday, 2013.

Tuskan, Erhan, and Jaap Vogel. *Lied uit den vreemde. Brieven en foto's van Turkse migranten 1964–1975*. Aksant, 2004.

Van Hasselt, Laura, and Vinnie van der Linde. "Hoe woonden de eerste gastarbeiders?" *Ons Amsterdam* (November–December 2011): 450–451.

Verlaan, Tim, and Aimée Albers. "From Hippies to Yuppies: Marginal Gentrification in Amsterdam's Jordaan and De Pijp Neighbourhoods 1960–1990." *City* 26, no. 2–3 (2022): 496–518.

Wasielewski, Amanda. *From City Space to Cyberspace: Art, Squatting, and Internet Culture in the Netherlands*. Amsterdam University Press, 2021.

Wesseling, Janneke. "Karton met 'positieve' boodschap." *NRC Handelsblad*, 6 August 1991, 6.

Wingen, Ed. "Işık Tüzüner: 'Kunst moet positief zijn.'" *De Telegraaf*, 16 August 1991, T15.

About the Authors

Dr **Irem Burcu Özkan Hoeijmakers** is an academic tutor at PPLE College, University of Amsterdam. She is a legal philosopher whose dissertation (2020) is on law and behaviour. She previously worked as a research assistant at Istanbul University, Faculty of Law.

Dr **Laura van Hasselt** is a postdoctoral researcher at the Amsterdam Diaries Project and teaches public history at the University of Amsterdam. Her dissertation on Piet van Eeghen (2022) combines urban history and biography. She previously worked as a curator at the Amsterdam Museum.

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

III.

Routes and Routines

DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-pt3

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

8. Fetching Dogs from Depositions: Examining Canine Agency in Early Modern Conflict Stories

Daan C. Jansen

Abstract: This chapter explores human–canine interactions in eighteenth-century Amsterdam by using depositions as manifestations of life writing. This chapter argues that dogs transformed city life just as they were shaped by it. It demonstrates this through four sets of depositions that each highlight different aspects of human–canine interactions: dogs seeking contact with each other, human and canine territoriality, dogs becoming lost, and barking. In each of these sections, it will examine dogs not just as agents of disruption, but as beings possessing their own volition. This chapter indicates the complexities of early modern Amsterdam's understudied multi-species society and offers an introduction to the history of Amsterdam's non-human urban lives.

Keywords: multi-species society; non-human agency; urban history; animal–human relations; early modern Amsterdam; life writing

Introduction

At noon on 7 December 1758, Amsterdam citizens Christiaan Knoop and Bastiaan Tiler were walking down Warmoesstraat when they passed by Jan de Haan's house.[1] There, they saw a small dog pawing at the door, apparently trying to get into the dwelling. When they saw De Haan inside looking out of

1 I would like to thank Petra van Dam and Bob Pierik for their supervision of my research, Mark Jenner for his invaluable help in producing this chapter, and the editors of this volume for their thoughtful insights and comments on earlier versions of this text.

Rensen, Marleen, Leonieke Vermeer, Laura van Hasselt and Ernestine Hoegen, eds. *Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity: Urban Lives*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2025.
DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-8

a window in the door, Knoop told him to open it and let his dog inside. They then continued on their way down the street. Without saying a word, De Haan exited his house brandishing a knife, approached them, and slashed at Knoop's neck and Tiler's hand, injuring them both severely. De Haan returned home and Knoop fled the scene, but Tiler went back, following advice from a neighbour, to ask De Haan for *Jenever* (spirit) to disinfect his wound. They asked De Haan's wife to help, prompting De Haan to come out once again with his knife drawn. His wife managed to hold him back, so De Haan tried to order his large bulldog to attack Tiler as the dog left the house.[2]

This vivid story tells of a conflict between inhabitants of Amsterdam and about the lives of dogs that inhabited the city. Eighteenth-century Amsterdam was full of dogs. Dogs protected and lived in humans' homes, they performed tricks and comforted people, they performed draught labour, and they roamed, foraged and socialized in the city's streets with considerable autonomy.[3] In short, they made Amsterdam their home, just as much as the city's human inhabitants.

The events of the fight on 7 December 1758 have come down to us through a deposition: a declaration made to a notary by witnesses to a crime, used to help the *schout*, who was in charge of law enforcement in the city, in his investigation. Depositions themselves were not taken under oath, but the witnesses promised that they could repeat the information under oath if needed. Many of the cases described in a notary's office were never discussed in a courtroom and were instead resolved extrajudicially.[4] Because the notary's office was an accessible space, a wide range of people, including poor people, illiterate people and women, could end up as witnesses in a deposition, with their experiences surviving to the present day. Depositions have been used by historians to uncover evidence of their words and experiences. Depositions primarily describe criminal acts but can be read in different ways to ask a broad diversity of questions.[5]

2 Deposition of Christiaan Knoop et al., 7 December 1758, scan 555–56, inventory number 14256, Archief van de Notarissen ter Standplaats Amsterdam, Amsterdam City Archives (henceforth: Archive 5075, SA).

3 Daan C. Jansen, "Placing Man's Best Friend Back in the City: Exploring Human–Canine Society and Experiences in Eighteenth-Century Amsterdam" (MA thesis; Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2023).

4 Bob Pierik, "Urban Life on the Move: Gender and Mobility in Early Modern Amsterdam" (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam 2022), 37–38.

5 Examples that inspired my research are Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford University Press, 1987); Hans-Joachim Voth, *Time and Work in England 1750–1830* (Clarendon Press, 2000); Maria Ågren, ed., *Making a Living, Making a Difference: Gender and Work in Early Modern European Society*

In this chapter, I view depositions as a form of life writing.[6] They provide snippets of people's lives, their experiences and their perceptions of events. These snippets were mediated through a legal framework and were created with a particular goal: to see the resolution to a conflict and justice meted out. For this reason, depositions often have a more rigid format than other types of life writing. Depositions often contain the accounts of multiple people, each witness to (part of) the dispute. These accounts were woven together by the scribe at the notary's office who noted explicitly which statement was made by which witness. The process of crafting these multivocal retellings in a notary's office is vividly present in the source itself, as the narrative of one witness may be physically interrupted on the paper by the interjection of another, leading to words being scratched out or asterisks added, with further explanation in the margins. The reader can imagine the clamour of the witnesses making their depositions and, occasionally, a dog's bark can be heard.

Knoop and Tiler's deposition demonstrates that depositions can provide new insight into past interactions between humans and animals. Because depositions focus on the facts of a situation, the actions committed and the words spoken by those involved, humans and non-humans are placed on equal footing as co-creators of a disruptive situation.[7] Depositions demonstrate people's expectations of canine behaviour toward humans, as well as what human behaviour toward dogs was considered acceptable. Their focus on conflict, when the regular order is disrupted and things go amiss, further enhances the use of depositions for studying human expectations. What people described as abnormal behaviour for dogs can help inform us about what people considered normal. They also provide insight into how people attempted to resolve a conflict, what were acceptable means to deal with a canine threat and how dogs and humans navigated the social challenges of Amsterdam's multi-species society.

(Oxford University Press, 2016); Pierik, "Urban Life." Depositions have become much more accessible to historians through the Alle Amsterdamse Akten project, which has digitized a massive amount of documents held in the Amsterdam notarial archives. I made use of a small subset of these that were made fully searchable via the OCR tool Transkribus, which allowed me to search the documents for mentions of dogs.

6 Alan Stewart, *The Oxford History of Life Writing, Vol. 2: Early Modern* (Oxford University Press, 2018), ix; Zachary Leader, "Introduction," in *On Life Writing*, ed. Zachary Leader (Oxford University Press, 2015), 2. For further discussion, see: Winfried Schulze, "Ego-Dokumente. Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte?," in *Ego-Dokumente: Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte*, ed. Winfried Schulze (Akademie Verlag, 1996), 11–30.

7 John Charles Ryan, "Decentering the Human, Imagining the More-Than-Human (Poetry, Plants and the New England Region of Australia)" *Litera* 19 no. 2 (2020): 173–93.

This chapter will discuss how dogs shaped their lives in early modern Amsterdam, and how this impacted human lives. I emphasize the agency of non-humans and examine how they influence, embrace and conflict with human actions, expectations and intentions.[8] I use four sets of depositions that each highlight different aspects of human–canine interactions: dogs seeking contact with each other, human and canine territoriality, dogs becoming lost, and barking. In each of these sections, dogs are examined not just as agents of disruption, but as beings possessing their own volition. Thus, each section demonstrates two things: how humans relied on dogs in their daily lives, and how dogs' volition impacted human expectations. In doing so, I attempt to go beyond much of the existing animal historiography, which focuses on the uses and contributions of animals to human society. Instead, I view dogs as inhabiting Amsterdam in their own ways that coexisted and did not always overlap with human intent.[9] To this end, I refer to dogs using "they/them" pronouns when their sex is unknown, rather than "it," to avoid objectifying them linguistically.

Two issues stand out as particularly problematic for writing multi-species history. Firstly, virtually every historical source is produced by humans for human purposes. Second, the lives of dogs only appear insofar as they are visible and considered noteworthy by humans. Resolving the second issue falls beyond the scope of this chapter. The first issue tasks us to read sources creatively, focusing on apparently incidental details provided in the deposition to learn as much as possible about the context within which dogs and humans were interacting, within which we can interpret canine agency.[10] My interpretation of these descriptions is informed by interspecies hermeneutics, which involves the critical use of twentieth- and twenty-first-century animal behaviour studies to suggest pathways to understanding non-human behaviour in different historical circumstances.[11]

8 The theoretical works that have inspired my approach include Bruno Latour, "On Actor–Network Theory: A Few Clarifications Plus More Than a Few Complications," *Soziale Welt* 47 (1996): 369–81; Jason Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (Verso, 2015); Donna Haraway, "Staying with the Trouble: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene," in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History and the Crisis of Capitalism*, ed. Jason W. Moore (PM Press, 2016), 34–76.

9 For example, Clay McShane and Joel Tarr, *The Horse in the City: Living Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Karel Davids, *Dieren en Nederlanders: Zeven eeuwen lief en leed* (Uitgeverij Matrijs, 1989); Chris Pearson, *Dogopolis: How Dogs and Humans Made Modern New York, London and Paris* (University of Chicago Press, 2021).

10 I borrow this methodology from Pierik, "Urban Life," 39.

11 Interspecies hermeneutics has found implicit expression in several historical works that have inspired this article, including Thomas Almeroth-Williams, *City of Beasts: How Animals Shaped*

De Haan's Door

Dogs in Amsterdam had volition in pursuing their own social life and actively sought contact with one another. Humans had to adapt their behaviour and the physical boundaries of houses to account for this, as demonstrated by the events illustrated in the deposition described in the introduction.

Knoop asked De Haan to let the dog into his home because he interpreted the dog's pawing at the door as an attempt to enter their own home. Both human and dog tried in their own way to negotiate the opening of this physical barrier. Knoop and Tiler walked on after making the request, which indicates that they believed said request to be unproblematic, and the little dog is not mentioned again in the deposition. De Haan's large bulldog sought to exit the house and seized the opportunity when the door was left open for a longer period upon Tiler's return.

We must consider the possibility that these two dogs were seeking contact with one another. Perhaps they were friends, enemies or mates. Regardless of the nature of their relationship, if De Haan's burst of violence was directly related to Tiler's request that the dog be let in, it seems that De Haan had been trying to limit or restrict his bulldog's ability to interact with the little dog. The little dog may have been a longstanding source of irritation for him as he tried to keep the two apart. Their continued attempts to interact impacted not just De Haan's mood, but also Knoop and Tiler's health.

The presence and actions of dogs in Amsterdam not only influenced human interactions, but they also helped shape the physical structure of Amsterdam's houses. Early modern Dutch houses were remarkably open: doors were almost always unlocked during the day and preferably were left open if weather allowed. Open doors would allow non-humans to enter and exit houses whenever they wanted. For that reason, many houses in the city had so-called "Dutch" or double doors: doors of which the top and bottom halves could be opened independently.[12] The top half could remain open, allowing people to lean over and socialize with neighbours, while the bottom half was closed so that dogs could not exit or enter the building without humans enabling them to do so—essentially an inversion of the modern pet door. Lacking these, doors would have to remain closed throughout the day. Thus, the tendency of dogs to wander required humans in Amsterdam to

Georgian London (Manchester University Press, 2019); and Dawn Day Biehler, *Pests in the City: Flies, Bedbugs, Cockroaches, and Rats* (University of Washington Press, 2013). However, to my knowledge, the phrase is not in use among historians, and the methodology does not have a widely adopted name.

12 Pierik, "Urban Life," 112.

shape their houses and behaviours in particular ways to limit their freedom of movement.[13]

Defending the Home

Dogs were enforcers of human territoriality. They were nearly universally praised for their ability to guard property and homes against would-be intruders or thieves. Most dogs have an inherent desire to protect their territory, made use of by people. Even without training, dogs bark at unknown sounds or sights, alerting the humans in their households of potential threats. Guarding could be seen as a service rendered by dogs for their household. People with guard dogs could leave their houses to work or undertake other tasks without fear of finding their homes broken into or their possessions stolen. Dogs made particularly good guard animals because they could recognize and remember humans and learn whom to trust. In this way, they could be trusted to regulate people's entry into various parts of the home or the nearby area. They were not foolproof, however, as some thieves learnt that feeding a dog a sausage could quickly win their trust.[14] Additionally, dogs often had their own understanding of territoriality and protected places humans did not need them to in undesirable ways, leading to conflict between humans. Two similar depositions reveal this in practice.

On 9 December 1710, Jacob and Peter Grevenbroek, father and son, made a deposition to report a dog residing at sawmill De Jager.[15] The Grevenbroeks often passed by the sawmill on the way to their garden outside the city, where they and Jacob's young daughter Christina were regularly attacked by the miller's dog, who would run after them without barking. They attacked Christina and tore her skirt in August of that year, and a month later bit Jacob in his calf, which led to a gangrene infection that prevented him from walking for two months. Earlier that summer, Jacob had told

13 Leashes were also used to restrict movement of dogs within the house and outside. While legally required throughout the eighteenth century, the depositions under discussion in this chapter demonstrate that not all dogs were consistently kept on a leash.

14 Sausages were often offered as a snack to dogs to reward and encourage desirable behaviour. See: W. T., *Natuur- en Huishoudkundige Historie der Honden, of Onderwijs hoe men honden opvoeden, oppassen, gewennen, derzelver innerlijke en uiterlijke ziekten geneezen, en hen na belieen klein houden, of in wasdom verhinderen kan* (A Blusse en zoon, 1796); and Almeroth-Williams, *City of Beasts*, 187–211.

15 The modern Zaagmolenstraat, where the mill used to be, is named after this mill.

the dog's owner to kill the dog, but the woman refused, arguing that the dog did not bite.[16]

Forty-eight years later, on 9 November 1758, Clara Jaspers and Willem Klyn were transporting shrimp down Smaksteeg when they were suddenly attacked by a "very large dog" belonging to the surgeon Jan Christiaan Schols. The dog bit Jaspers very hard, which made her scream. A neighbour then came outside to yell at Schols, telling him that his dog had attacked passersby frequently and that Schols had to get rid of the dog. According to the deposition, Schols merely laughed at the whole affair and closed his door.[17]

These two depositions demonstrate the issues that could arise from overzealous guard dogs. These attacks took place very near to the houses these dogs lived in, and the dogs repeatedly became violently protective of what they perceived as their territory toward strangers. While the owners of both dogs allowed their dogs the freedom to leave their property to attack people and brushed off criticism of their biting dogs, it is unlikely that the dogs were instructed to attack people by their owners. Instead, these dogs attacked passersby of their own accord, becoming "problem dogs" that were unsafe for people to pass by, to the great frustration of neighbours and others in the area. Such dogs would have motivated some to choose different routes when walking through the city, or instilled worry and fear when passing by a violently territorial dog's domain. Remarkably in these instances, people suffered these problem dogs for long periods, perhaps months of repeated attacks, before finally approaching the authorities to report the dog's attacks and the owner's negligence. While people relied on dogs to enforce their own territoriality, conflicting understandings between dog and human of what space was to be protected greatly impacted how people navigated the city.

Reclaiming a Dog

Amsterdam dogs would sometimes go missing. This section demonstrates that dogs were seen as treasured possessions and the lengths to which people went to find them. It also postulates that dogs had a degree of freedom in getting "lost" and being found.

16 Deposition of Jacob Grevenbroek et al., 9 December 1710, scans 512–14, inv. nr. 8068, Archive 5075, SA. It is unclear from the deposition whether the owner was aware of the dog's biting.

17 Deposition of Jan Hermanus de Ruijter et al., 10 November 1758, scans 498–500, Archive 5075, SA.

In November 1781, a man named Schipper embarked on a dangerous mission. His dog had been stolen in April or May of that year, and six months later he got word that they had been sold on the Botermarkt to another household. The dog now stayed with Anna Catharina Valkenburg, who had no idea of their origin, as her husband had bought the dog. When Schipper approached Valkenburg about the fact that the dog had been stolen, she offered to return the dog in exchange for the purchasing costs, but he was appalled at the notion and refused. Instead, Schipper returned several days later with two friends and together they entered Valkenburg's house. Schipper headed straight for the dog, who he offered a sausage as he untied them and led them out of the house. In the deposition, Valkenburg painted a vivid scene of her daughter screaming "Mom! Mom! They want to take the dog!," and of herself holding the end of the dog's leash in an attempt to stop Schipper from (re)stealing the dog. She was held back by Schipper's friends and forced to let go of the rope. Schipper then made his getaway. Valkenburg gave chase when Schipper's friends let go of her, but she was unable to find him.[18]

Schipper had been on the lookout for his lost dog for six months after they went missing. Instead of simply getting a replacement, he was willing to risk his and his friends' safety and the legal repercussions of his (re) theft to be reunited with his dog. Schipper's actions were likely motivated in part by pride, as he was offended at the notion of having to buy back his stolen dog, but also by the strong affection he felt for his companion. Valkenburg, despite having been willing to sell the dog to Schipper, and outnumbered three-to-one, struggled against the men to keep the dog. Both parties wanted to retain possession of the dog, but what the dog wanted is unclear. Throughout most of the text, they remained central, but passive: the focus of a conflict but not an agent themselves. Their narrative passivity was disrupted, however, when they were offered a sausage as a bribe. The dog is revealed to have had a choice to go with Schipper willingly or to resist him, and Schipper tried to "sweeten the deal" by offering a tasty snack. Whether the dog went with Schipper willingly is unclear. Schipper may have picked the dog up, or they may have walked with him. Either way, Schipper was aware that the dog had a choice and tried to convince them to choose him.

Before Schipper's dog was sold on the Botermarkt, they must have been stolen or wandered away. Some dogs may have chosen to leave their households and not return. Hundreds of eighteenth-century advertisements in

18 Deposition of Anna Catharina Valkenburg et al., 19 December 1781, scans 232–35, inv. nr. 14272, Archive 5075, SA.

the *Amsterdamse Courant* reveal that Schipper was certainly not the only one who had lost his dog in the city. People seeking to be reunited with their lost property often placed advertisements in the newspapers, but pets, and dogs particularly, are unique in that they can lose themselves, rather than be misplaced.[19] What exactly transpired to keep these dogs from returning is unclear. Some, especially valuable dogs such as lapdogs or hunting dogs, may have been snatched off the streets by dognappers to be sold to unsuspecting buyers such as Valkenburg's husband, or even to be held ransom to the owners.[20] Some dogs may have gotten lost and disoriented in the city's busy traffic. Others may have chosen to leave their households, perhaps drawn by tastier sausages, and decided to remain away.[21] The presence of dogs on the streets of the city, roaming freely and interacting with other people and dogs, provided them ample opportunity to "get lost" or decide not to return.

Do Barking Dogs Bite?

Dog barking was a commonly heard acoustic element of the early modern urban soundscape, to the frustration of many of its human inhabitants.[22] While animal noises have been studied by historians as the starting point

19 Amsterdam was not unique in this instance, nor were dogs the only subject of such advertisements. See: Tim Wales, "Thief Takers and Their Clients in Later Stuart London," in *Londinopolis: Essays In the Cultural and Social History of Early Modern London*, ed. Paul Griffiths and Mark S. R. Jenner (Manchester University Press, 2005), 69–70; Kate Smith, "Lost Things and the Making of Material Cultures in Eighteenth-Century London," *Journal of Social History* 55, no. 4 (2022): 875–98.

20 Some advertisements promised to offer a reward for whoever returned their dogs, with no questions asked—potentially allowing a thief to return the dog without being arrested, in exchange for the reward. See, for example, the *Amsterdamse Courant* issue of 6 May 1758. The act of placing a lost dog advertisement in the newspaper may in part have been intended to make people aware of the dog's ownership so that they would not buy them on a market.

21 Very little research has been conducted on why dogs might leave a household. Most research instead has focused on strategies for returning dogs and the emotional trauma inflicted upon humans by their dogs disappearing. Some research has been done on modern intra-household conflicts between dogs and humans, which may serve to give some perspective, but it does not fully answer our question. Escaping physical abuse may have been an important factor, as violent negative reinforcement was considered a necessary part of training dogs at the time. Cf. Ádám Miklósi, *Dog Behaviour, Evolution and Cognition*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2015), 81–85; for eighteenth-century dog training methods, see W. T., *Historie der Honden*, for example, p. 20.

22 Emily Cockayne, *Hubbub: Filth, Noise and Stench in England, 1600–1770* (Yale University Press, 2008), 107, 114.

for conflicts, they are usually viewed as unavoidable by-products of the animals' presence—the contexts within which these noises were produced are not studied.[23] Dogs do not bark just to make noise and irritate people; they bark to communicate specifically *with humans*. Domesticated dogs have developed a more varied range of acoustic sounds than wolves, their undomesticated genetic relatives, and employ barks to communicate in more diverse situations. Wolves bark only as a warning to others, while dogs bark to express aggression, fear, loneliness, excitement, happiness and other emotions. People are generally quite well able to distinguish between the emotive qualities of a bark.[24] In the following deposition, I demonstrate that a dog's bark could be seen as a challenge-by-proxy from their owner. However, a dog's bark was not meaningless to the dog: it was a means of communication within a particular context.

On New Year's Day of 1785, Roedolf Schade and Abraham Gefken were at a stable on Prinsengracht watching people skate on the ice, when two strangers, Albert Brouwmeester and Carels Emmerikz, walked past. A dog on the street barked at the passersby. Brouwmeester asked another passerby if the dog belonged to him, and then approached Schade and repeated his question. When he responded negatively, Emmerikz, who was taller, asked him if he "had as much heart as that dog." Schade enquired as to the meaning of that question, and Brouwmeester seized him by his shirt and repeated Emmerikz's question before shoving him into a cart. Gefken handed Schade a pitchfork, which he used to defend himself against the two men. Schade hit one of the two men with the pitchfork, and both Brouwmeester and Emmerikz made their escape. The fight made such a ruckus that several neighbours showed up with weapons to bring it to an end.[25]

This fight broke out because a dog barked and two men took offence. It was far from the only fight that broke out over barking. A deposition made by Antonya Lomans describes how she and her barking dog were

23 Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (Basic Books, 1984), 96.

24 Domestic dogs bark much more and in many more contexts than wolves or feral dogs do. This indicates that pre-domesticated canines did not have as much need for barking as a means of communication. Dogs who do not often or ever encounter humans have also been observed barking less frequently. This indicates that dogs bark to communicate specifically with humans. Modern research demonstrates that people are able to distinguish between the different kinds of dog barks even if they did not own dogs themselves. Assuming peoples' exposure to dogs was the same, if not greater, in the eighteenth century, it is reasonable to assume that people were equally able to distinguish barks. Cf. Miklósi, *Dog Behaviour*, 255–57.

25 Deposition of Hermanus Schut et al., 3 January 1785, scans 4–6, inv. nr. 14274, Archive 5075, SA.

attacked by one of her lodgers at midnight on 14 September 1757, and another deposition made by Grietje Meyer describes how a man tried to stab a dog that had been barking late at night on 15 October 1784.[26] The reasons these dogs may have been barking cannot be interpreted from the limited information available in the deposition. They were making noise for a reason, even if that reason is inscrutable to historians, and these barks impacted human lives.

Early modern Amsterdam was a violent city, where honour culture demanded that people responded to verbal challenges with violence. Many people were armed with knives to defend their bodies and honour and that of their friends and families. When challenged to fight by humans, or when yelled at or insulted, people often responded with violence rather than backing down.[27] If people interpreted a dog's bark as a challenge, they would have responded in kind, attacking either the dog or whoever would protect them. Emmerikz may have interpreted the dog's bark as a proxy for a challenge from Schade and Gefken, which would explain the puzzling question, "Do you have as much heart as that dog?" Thus, dogs were an extension of early modern honour culture. This carried issues, as when Schade and Gefken did not intend to make a challenge. The dog's barks caused a conflict that neither Schade nor Gefken were looking for.

Whether a dog barked was an important element in the narrative of a deposition. After Bernardus Harmsen and Catrina de Ligt were attacked by a dog in March 1782, they made a deposition telling the history of the dog that bit them, emphasizing that the dog often barked at people, as a prelude to the attacks they had witnessed or themselves experienced. The dog's barks were portrayed as a threat and a prelude to their later violence.[28] Conversely, when Jacob Grevenbroek and his family made a deposition about an aggressive dog that had been attacking his family for some months in 1710, they made explicit mention that the dog attacked them without barking at all. The lack of an auditory threat before the attacks was used in the deposition to present the attacks as particularly sudden and dangerous. In early modern Amsterdam, it seems, barking dogs *were* expected to bite.

26 For example, deposition of Antonya Lomans et al., 21 September 1757, scans 337–38, inv. nr. 14255, Archive 5075, SA; and deposition of Jan van Os et al., 22 October 1784, scans 444–46, inv. nr. 14273, Archive 5075, SA.

27 Pieter Spierenburg, *A History of Murder: Personal Violence in Europe from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Polity, 2008), 88.

28 Deposition of Bernardus Henricus Harmsen et al., 26 March 1787, scan 333–35, inv. nr. 14273, Archive 5075, SA.

Conclusion

By focusing on canine voices and actions in depositions, we can learn much about their previously unknown lives in early modern Amsterdam. It has become clear that dogs were not just environmental features or living property. Dogs shaped human architecture through the Dutch door, which allowed people to socialize with other humans while limiting canine mobility. Problem dogs influenced how people navigated the city, instilling trepidation or convincing people to take different routes. They sparked conflicts between humans, because of attacks, verbal challenges via barks, or conflicts over ownership and desires to be reunited with lost companions. People had to account for canine volition, which could lead to unexpected and unwanted situations such as those described above.

This chapter has demonstrated the richness of the information we can learn about the daily practice of dog–human interactions by viewing depositions as life writing. They offer descriptions not just of disruption, but also of the daily lives of everyday inhabitants of Amsterdam, be they canine or human. However, dogs and humans were not the only animals that inhabited Amsterdam, and more research deserves to be done to craft truly multi-species histories: histories that focus not just on how people thought about or made use of animals, but how humans inhabited a multi-species network. Other animals also transformed city life just as they were shaped by it, and further research into how they inhabited cities is sorely needed. Amsterdam was as much their city as it was ours.

Bibliography

Sources

Amsterdam City Archives. Archive 5075: Archief van de Notarissen ter Standplaats Amsterdam, inv. nrs. 8068, 8069, 8304A, 8304B, 8305B, 13132, 11917, 14255, 14256, 14257, 14272, 14273, 14274.

Amsterdamse Courant. Accessible online on Delpher.nl.

Literature

Ågren, Maria, ed. *Making a Living, Making a Difference: Gender and Work in Early Modern European Society.* Oxford University Press, 2016.

Almeroth-Williams, Thomas. *City of Beasts: How Animals Shaped Georgian London.* Manchester University Press, 2019.

Biehler, Dawn Day. *Pests in the City: Flies, Bedbugs, Cockroaches, and Rats*. University of Washington Press, 2013.

Cockayne, Emily. *Hubbub: Filth, Noise and Stench in England, 1600–1770*. Yale University Press, 2008.

Darnton, Robert. *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History.* Basic Books, 1984.

Davids, Karel. *Dieren en Nederlanders: Zeven eeuwen lief en leed.* Uitgeverij Matrijs, 1989.

Davis, Natalie Zemon. *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France.* Stanford University Press, 1987.

Haraway, Donna. "Staying with the Trouble: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene." In *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History and the Crisis of Capitalism*, edited by Jason Moore, 34–76. PM Press, 2016.

Jansen, Daan C. "Placing Man's Best Friend Back in the City: Exploring Human–Canine Society and Experiences in Eighteenth-Century Amsterdam." MA thesis, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2023.

Latour, Bruno. "On Actor–Network Theory: A Few Clarifications Plus More Than a Few Complications." *Soziale Welt* 47 (1996): 369–81.

Leader, Zachary. "Introduction." In *On Life Writing*, edited by Zachary Leader. Oxford University Press, 2015.

McShane, Clay, and Joel Tarr. *The Horse in the City: Living Machines in the Nineteenth Century.* Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.

Miklósi, Ádám. *Dog Behaviour, Evolution and Cognition.* 2nd ed. Oxford University Press, 2015.

Moore, Jason. *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital.* Verso, 2015.

Pearson, Chris. *Dogopolis: How Dogs and Humans Made Modern New York, London and Paris.* University of Chicago Press, 2021.

Pierik, Bob. "Urban Life on the Move: Gender and Mobility in Early Modern Amsterdam." PhD thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2022.

Ryan, John Charles. "Decentering the Human, Imagining the More-Than-Human (Poetry, Plants and the New England Region of Australia)." *Litera* 19, no. 2 (2020): 173–93.

Schulze, Winfried. "Ego-Dokumente. Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte?" In *Ego-Dokumente: Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte*, edited by Winfried Schulze, 11–30. Akademie Verlag, 1996.

Smith, Kate. "Lost Things and the Making of Material Cultures in Eighteenth-Century London." *Journal of Social History* 55, no. 4 (2022): 875–98.

Spierenburg, Pieter. *A History of Murder: Personal Violence in Europe from the Middle Ages to the Present.* Polity, 2008.

Stewart, Alan. *The Oxford History of Life Writing, Vol. 2: Early Modern*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

Voth, Hans-Joachim. *Time and Work in England 1750–1830.* Clarendon Press, 2000.

Wales, Tim. "Thief Takers and Their Clients in Later Stuart London." In *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social History of Early Modern London*, edited by Paul Griffiths and Mark S. R. Jenner, 67–84. Manchester University Press, 2005.

W. T. *Natuur- en Huishoudkundige Historie der Honden, of Onderwijs hoe men honden opvoeden, oppassen, gewennen, derzelver innerlijke en uiterlijke ziekten geneezen, en hen na belieen klein houden, of in wasdom verhinderen kan.* A Blusse en zoon, 1796.

About the Author

Daan C. Jansen, an animal historian, completed a research master's at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam on human–canine interactions in eighteenth-century Amsterdam. He is now pursuing a PhD at the University of York, studying brown rats' impact in early modern England and the Netherlands.

9. The Amsterdam Diaries of Netje Asser and Hanna da Costa-Belmonte[1]

Peter Buijs

Abstract: This chapter explores the role of Amsterdam in shaping the diaries of two Jewish women in the early nineteenth century: Netje Asser (1807–1893) and Hanna da Costa-Belmonte (1800–1867). It examines how the city influenced their lives and contributed to their personal identities. After a brief biographical introduction and a discussion of the concept of personal identity, their diaries are analysed in detail. The findings demonstrate that, while Amsterdam plays a significant role in their diaries—shaping daily routines and social interactions—it was not the sole determinant of their identity. Other factors, such as their privileged position in early-nineteenth-century society, their familial roles as wives and mothers, and their religious practices, were more central to their sense of self.

Keywords: Jewish women's writing; personal identity; urban experience; religious life; family roles; nineteenth-century Netherlands

On 1 January 1819, eleven-year-old Netje Asser from Amsterdam started keeping a diary.[2] She would continue for the next thirteen years, and ended her diary in 1832, about a year after she married her cousin Louis Asser

1 I would like to thank my partner, Monique Stavenuiter, my daughter, Emma Buijs, and Laura van Hasselt for their comments on an earlier version of this article. I thank my colleague Marga Pepping for transcribing part of the diary of Netje Asser. Finally, I would like to thank Benjamin Roberts for checking my English.

2 The diary of Netje Asser is in the document collection of the Jewish Museum in Amsterdam, object number D015738. A selection of the diary of Netje was published in 1964 by Isabella H. van Eeghen, *Uit Amsterdamse dagboeken. De jeugd van Netje en Eduard Asser 1819–1833* (Scheltema en Holkema, 1964).

Rensen, Marleen, Leonieke Vermeer, Laura van Hasselt and Ernestine Hoegen, eds. *Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity: Urban Lives*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2025.
DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-9

and moved to The Hague. Almost every day she wrote about the weather, who visited the family, and who they visited. Netje also recorded the many strolls she took through Amsterdam. In this city she was born on 16 December 1807 into a Jewish family on "the silent side of Reguliersgracht."[3] The diary—which was written the first eight years in French and from 1828 onwards in Dutch—gives us a very vivid image of the personality of Netje who emerges from her personal writings as a lively, funny and carefree girl.

Hanna da Costa-Belmonte in turn started her diary on 22 January 1821 mentioning her engagement to Isaac da Costa.[4] At the moment she started keeping her diary, Hanna Belmonte and Isaac da Costa were still Jewish, and both belonged to the Sephardic community of Amsterdam. According to her diary she married Isaac in the Amsterdam town hall on 5 July 1821 followed by their Jewish marriage on 11 July of that same year. On 5 February 1822 she recorded her first pregnancy followed by a miscarriage on 22 March. In the same period, she noted in her diary that she became acquainted with Mr and Mrs Bilderdijk.[5] Mr Bilderdijk was the famous poet Willem Bilderdijk who influenced Isaac and Hanna to convert to Protestant Christianity. Hanna described their baptism on 20 October 1822 in detail. Except for several interruptions, she kept her diary for forty-three years and made her last entry on 16 June 1865, at the age of sixty-five. In her diary she recorded, just like Netje Asser, the people she visited, the guests she received, her eighteen (!) pregnancies, her many miscarriages, the deaths of many of their children, reflections on her Christian faith and the consolation it gave her in the many disasters and setbacks that she and Isaac experienced in their lives.

Why focus on these two specific diaries of Jewish women? These texts offer a rare and invaluable perspective on the lived experiences of Jewish individuals in early-nineteenth-century Amsterdam.[6] Diaries from Jewish women in this period are scarce, and these two provide an exceptional opportunity to explore not only the personal identities of their authors but also the broader social, cultural and religious dynamics of Jewish life

3 Ibid., 17.

4 The diary of Hanna da Costa-Belmonte is kept in the collection of Allard Pierson (formerly the Special Collections of the University Library) in Amsterdam, inventory number OTM: HS RA H: 415–416. A photocopy of the diary is in the collection of the Jewish Museum, object number D005757. In this article I make use of the edition of O.W. Dubois. Hanna da Costa-Belmonte and O. W Dubois, *Dagboekje van Hanna da Costa-Belmonte* (Groen, 2000).

5 Dubois, *Dagboekje van Hanna da Costa-Belmonte*, 31.

6 For more information, see this article on an exhibition showcasing these two diaries alongside other egodocuments: Peter Buijs, "Ik, Joods?! Een tentoonstelling over egodocumenten in het Joods Museum," *De Boekenwereld* 39, no. 1 (2023): 52–57.

in Amsterdam.[7] Moreover, as a substantial portion of the Amsterdam population at the time was Jewish, it is all the more significant to centre these voices in the historical narrative. By juxtaposing these two diaries, we gain insight into the diversity of Jewish experiences.

Both diaries give an intimate image of life in upper-class Amsterdam in the early nineteenth century. Both came from Jewish families, and both wrote extensively about their daily life. But the differences between them are also striking. Netje's life—at least as reflected in her diary—was more carefree and included visits to the theatre, social gatherings and walks through Amsterdam, while Hanna's was centred primarily around her dramatic family life and her Christian faith.

In this chapter, I will address the role the city of Amsterdam played in these diaries and will ask if and how Amsterdam shaped the personal identity of Netje Asser and Hanna da Costa-Belmonte. Before answering these questions, I will first give a short biographical sketch of both women. Next, I will locate the place of their diaries in the history of personal documents in general and in Jewish personal documents in particular. Then I will briefly discuss the concept of personal identity and what it meant for Netje Asser and Hanna da Costa-Belmonte. Finally, I will focus on the role of the city of Amsterdam in their diaries and personal identity.

Short Biographical Sketches of Netje and Hanna

Netje Asser (officially Anna Gratia Mariana Asser) was the daughter of Tobias Asser and Caroline Itzig, who was originally from Berlin. Both her parents descended from families who were adherents to both the Haskalah (the Jewish Enlightenment) and the European Enlightenment. They were part of a cosmopolitan culture, and the Asser family had a large network of contacts which expanded beyond Amsterdam and the Netherlands.[8] The diary of Netje provides a fascinating and lively portrait of life in an enlightened Jewish circle at the beginning of the nineteenth century. These enlightened Jews had a lifestyle that hardly differed from the non-Jewish

7 The list "Egodocument 1814–1914" on the website of the Onderzoeksinstituut Egodocumenten en Geschiedenis mentions only a very limited number of Jewish personal documents (http://www.egodocument.net/repertorium.html). The only other diaries in the collection of the Jewish Museum in Amsterdam are those of Carel Daniel Asser (object number D015739) and Eduard Isaac Asser (object number D015740). These diaries are not mentioned in the list mentioned above.

8 On the Asser family, see Arthur Eyffinger, *T. M. C. Asser (1838–1913): "In Quest of Liberty, Justice, and Peace,"* 2 vols. (Brill, 2019), 1:15–102.

elite from that period. In 1821 her grandfather Mozes Salomon Asser, who had played an important role in the emancipation of the Dutch Jews in 1796, bought a large house on the Singel canal opposite of the Mint Tower. Netje's parents also moved into this house with their family, which besides her parents consisted of her brothers Eduard and Carel, and her sister Henriette (Jetje). Prior to that, the family had lived along the Herengracht canal. At both residents, there was a continuous coming and going of visitors. Isaac da Costa, the husband of Hanna da Costa-Belmonte, and the leading Jewish Amsterdam lawyer Jonas Daniël Meijer, among others, honoured the Asser family with visits.[9] The non-Jewish lawyer Maurits Cornelis van Hall was also a regular guest.[10] In 1831 Netje married her first cousin Louis Asser. Louis was the son of Rose Levin from Berlin and the lawyer Carel Asser who, like his father Mozes Salomon Asser, played an important role in the emancipation of the Dutch Jews. He was, among others, an advisor on Jewish matters to King Louis Napoleon and King William I.[11] Netje and Louis had three children: Rosa, Johanna and Carel. In 1850, her husband died, and Netje lived another forty-three years and died in 1893 at the ripe old age of eighty-six.

Hanna Belmonte, seven years older than Netje Asser, was born in Amsterdam in 1800 as the daughter of Jacob Belmonte and Simcha da Costa. Her father, who died in 1804, had moved to Maastricht where, in 1803, he converted to Roman Catholicism. Although she was raised Jewish, she had also attended a Protestant school in her youth.[12] The famous poet Potgieter described Hanna as "an endearing and almost Andalusian beauty."[13] After her marriage with Isaac da Costa, she and her husband converted to Protestant Christianity and afterwards associated primarily with the people of the Amsterdam Réveil, an orthodox Protestant revival movement.[14] After thirty-nine years of marriage her husband died in 1860. Hanna would survive her husband by another seven years and died in 1867 in Amsterdam. At the end of her life only three of her many children were still alive.

9 Van Eeghen, *Uit Amsterdamse dagboeken*, 33.

10 Ibid., 109.

11 On the emancipation of the Dutch Jews and the role of the Asser family in Hetty Berg, see *De gelykstaat der joden: inburgering van een minderheid* (Waanders, 1996).

12 Dubois, *Dagboekje van Hanna da Costa-Belmonte*, 11.

13 'Een innemende, schier Andalusische schoone.' Cited via Jaap Meijer, *Isaac da Costa's weg naar het christendom: bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van de joodsche problematiek in Nederland* (Joachimsthal, 1946), 100. The English translations of the citations are mine.

14 On the conversion of Hanna and other women in her family, see Judith Frishman, "The Belmonte Women and Their Conversion to Christianity: 'Heil u, geachte vrouw, uit Abrahams zaad gesproten,'" *Studia Rosenthaliana* 32, no. 2 (1996): 198–201.

Netje's and Hanna's Diaries in the History of Personal Documents

Until the eighteenth century, diaries were mainly used as a mnemonic tool by their authors. Furthermore, it was not even necessary to write such a practical diary yourself. The sixteenth-century writer Michel de Montaigne for example, wrote in his famous *Essays* that his father instructed one of his secretaries to keep a diary. According to Michel de Montaigne it was very pleasant to read such a diary and to recapitulate who visited the castle of Montaigne, who worked there, who was born and who died, etc. Montaigne regretted that he had not kept such a diary himself.[15] The famous Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus in turn advised his Antwerp humanist friend Pieter Gillis in 1516—after the latter had complained about his memory troubles—to keep a diary.[16] It was only from the 1780s onwards that diaries came to be used more often as a *journal intime*, in which people wrote extensively about themselves and their personal feelings. Of course, this does not apply to all diaries. For Dutch Jewish diaries we see the same development as in non-Jewish diaries, but only a few decades later. This relatively late introduction of intimate Jewish diaries was probably related to the cultural isolation in which many Dutch Jews lived. It is therefore not surprising to find the first of such diaries, like those of Netje and Hanna, in social circles that were more integrated and sophisticated and who were fully participating in European culture.[17]

Personal Identity

To answer the question what Amsterdam meant for Netje and Hanna and for their personal identity, we must first address the question of what personal identity actually is. The concept of personal identity is closely related with concepts such as the self, personhood, personality, character and individuality and is closely related to the question: "Who am I?" The basic principle is that personal identity relates to a unique and morally independent individual. In addition, it is assumed that this unique self has

15 Peter Buijs, *De geboorte van het moderne ik. Geluk en identiteit in Nederlandse egodocumenten 1500–1850* (Verloren, 2021), 46.

16 Ibid., 44–45.

17 Marcus Moseley, *Being for Myself Alone: Origins of Jewish Autobiography* (Stanford University Press, 2006), 14–15. For developments in autobiographical writing in general, see Arianne Baggerman, Rudolf Dekker and Michael Mascuch, eds, *Controlling Time and the Shaping of the Self: Developments in Autobiographical Writing since the Sixteenth Century* (Brill, 2011).

a kind of inner nature that is so deep that Sigmund Freud believed that it is not accessible, even to ourselves. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that personal identity is not something detached from society as a whole. Personal identity is closely connected to the role (or roles) you play in society, for example, as a student, labourer, husband or parent. Individual and society are two sides of the same coin. Society consists of individuals who act, and these individuals are both acting within a certain social structure and influenced by this structure at the same time. Moreover, personal identity is determined, on the one hand, by a certain continuity over time and, on the other hand, by distinction. Regarding the first, it concerns questions such as: Will I be the same tomorrow as I was today? Do I keep my promises? The second aspect is about what distinguishes us from others.[18]

Although Netje and Hanna do not themselves explicitly ask the question, "Who am I?," we can infer some information about their personal identity from what they wrote in their diaries. For Netje her identity was primarily determined by her position as a woman in prominent circles. Although Netje paid little attention to her Jewishness, it still played a role in the background. Confronted during a stay in Berlin with Jews who converted to Christianity, she and her brother Eduard accused these converted Jews of hypocrisy.[19] Her identity also had an inner aspect and sometimes she expressed feelings of sadness in her diary. For Hanna, just like for Netje, her identity was connected to her elevated societal position as a formerly Jewish and later Christian woman, married to one of the most famous Dutch poets of the early nineteenth century. The inner aspect of her identity becomes evident from 1830 onwards in the many expressions of her feelings about the deaths of many of her children but also about her troubles with her husband. The most important aspect of her identity, however, was her Christian faith. In the remainder of this chapter, I will focus on the role of Amsterdam in the diaries of these two women and how the city might have influenced or shaped their personal identity.

18 This exposition on personal identity is based on a section of my book, Buijs, *De geboorte van het moderne ik*, 13–15. In that book I made use among others of studies like Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Harvard University Press, 1989); Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2005); Jacques Bos, "Reading the Soul: The Transformation of the Classical Discourse on Character 1550–1760" (PhD diss., Universiteit Leiden, 2003); Peter Burke and Jan E. Stets, *Identity Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2011); Roy F. Baumeister, *Identity: Cultural Change and the Struggle for Self* (Oxford University Press, 1986).

19 This accusation is not mentioned by Netje in her diary, but by her brother Eduard Isaac Asser in an entry of his diary of 5 June 1830. This diary is also in the collection of the Jewish Museum in Amsterdam, object number D015740.

Amsterdam in the Diaries and Lives of Netje and Hanna

The connection of both Netje Asser and Hanna da Costa-Belmonte with the city of Amsterdam was evident from the beginning of their lives. Both were born to Jewish parents in Amsterdam. They knew each other but the families Asser and Da Costa lost contact after the conversion of Hanna and her husband. Although the Asser family was quite liberal, they did not like converted Jews.[20] Netje, to begin with her, started her diary in 1819, relating on the title page: "Journal pour l'année 1819 de Mademoiselle A. G. M. Asser, née à Amsterdam le 16 Décembre 1807 et y demeurant." So, she attached at least some importance to the fact of being born in Amsterdam and still living there. She lived in Amsterdam until her marriage to Louis Asser in 1831, and then moved to The Hague. Hanna da Costa-Belmonte, in turn, lived all her life in Amsterdam. In both diaries Amsterdam is emphatically present. But the Amsterdam of Netje was a different city from the Amsterdam of Hanna. For both the city consisted primarily of the people whom they met and with whom they lived their lives. Netje's social circle, however, was quite different from that of Hanna. Netje socialized with the so-called *haute juiverie*; meaning, Jews from the higher echelons of society who spoke and wrote French and Dutch and who were detached from the Yiddish-speaking culture of the poor Ashkenazi Jews from the old Jewish neighbourhood. The Amsterdam life of Netje included visits to the theatre, concerts, parties and walks through Amsterdam. Hanna's circle consisted mainly of people from the Amsterdam Réveil, the early-nineteenth-century Protestant Christian revival movement of which her husband became a leading member. Hanna's Amsterdam life was centred around her Christian faith. It was a life that included visits to several Amsterdam churches, and to religious social gatherings in private houses where her husband, Isaac da Costa, often took a leading part.

Netje Asser's Amsterdam

For Netje Asser Amsterdam was primarily a "fun city." She regularly visited what she called the "Comedie," the City Theatre close to the Leidseplein. She commented on whether the performances were animated or not. On Friday, 5 January 1830, she wrote: "I went with Carel to the Comedie to see Dame Blanche. It was empty and not animated. We didn't enjoy ourselves very

20 Van Eeghen, *Uit Amsterdamse dagboeken*, 34.

much."[21] On Saturday, 7 January, her experience was somewhat better: "I went with Dad and Mum to the Comedie and saw the colporteur. It was fun. I liked the music very much, but in general it was not very successful."[22] On 12 February 1831 she was more positive: "I [...] went with Dad and Mum and Jet to the Comedie where I amused myself very well. [...] [I]t was animated and very busy."[23] Theatre visits could nonetheless be annoying because of arguments with other visitors, such as on Saturday, 30 February 1830: "Dad had almost a dispute with someone sitting in his seat."[24]

Another of Netje's favourite pastimes was visiting concerts, most of the time performed in private homes. On Monday, 5 January 1830 she went with her friend Netje Mendes to a concert, "where I amused myself very much, it was sweet. Louise played well and Thomas sang beautiful."[25] Concerts were also given in Tecum Habita, the building of the Maatschappij ter Bevordering van de Toonkunst (Society for the Promotion of Music) at Herengracht 248, a concert hall she visited several times. On 25 March 1830 she visited a concert there with "Miss Oltmans, her father and Miss Grave. I amused myself. It was sweet and rather casual."[26] And on 23 March 1831 she wrote: "In the evening I went to a concert in Tecum Habita with Miss Oltmans. I had a pretty good time. Klijn played very nicely. It was very full, but I did not know many people."[27]

Amsterdam was also the setting for the many walks Netje took. A favourite place for her to take such walks was in the "Plantage" (Plantation) neighbourhood, which she also called "The Park." Early in the nineteenth century the Plantage was still an undeveloped area within the city borders. Netje wasn't the only one who liked to go there. On 10 April 1831 she wrote in her diary that she walked to the Plantage "where it was particularly full

21 "Ik ben met Carel naar de Comedie gegaan de Dame Blanche zien, het was er leeg en niet geanimeerd, we hebben ons niet zeer geamuseerd."

22 "Ik ben met Papa en Mama naar de Comedie geweest, de Colporteur zien. Ik heb mij er wel mede geamuseerd. De muziek bevalt mij zeer, doch in het algemeen heeft het niet veel succes gehad."

23 "met Papa en Mama en Jet naar de Comedie gegaan waar ik mij goed geamuseerd heb, [...] het was er geanimeerd en zeer vol."

24 "Papa had bijna dispuut gehad met iemand, die op zijn plaats zat."

25 "waar ik mij goed geamuseerd heb, het was regt lief. Louise heeft goed gespeeld en Thomas mooi gezongen."

26 "Ik heb mij er wel geamuseerd, het was er lief en vrij ongegeneerd." *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (WNT) translates "*ongeneerd*" with "*ongedwongen*" ("casual").

27 "'s Avonds ben ik met Jufvr. Oltmans naar een concert geweest in Tecum Habita. Ik heb mij vrij goed geamuseerd. Klijn heeft heel mooi gespeeld, het was er heel vol, doch weinig menschen van mijne kennis."

of pedestrians and carriages."[28] It was also a place to meet people. "We met with Louis and Mrs Mendes."[29] On Friday, 11 February 1831, she wrote about a long walk she took with her sister Jetje. "[I] took a long walk with Jetje on the canals to the Westermarkt."[30] In the harsh winters of the early nineteenth century, walking could sometimes be difficult. Luckily then, there was sometimes a polite young man to help you out, such as on Sunday, 24 January 1830:

> We had to cross a very high bridge on the Achterburgwal canal, when we stood on it we didn't dare to cross it, it was so slippery. A young man, a little stiff, but very polite, like a true knight and protector of the roads, volunteered to help us get off. I accepted it and we walked off the bridge without hesitation. I thanked him kindly and we said goodbye, but I was truly struck by that special politeness and talked about it with Jetje for a long time.[31]

Not only walking, but also shopping brought Netje to many parts of Amsterdam. On Monday, 15 February 1830, she noted: "I went out for Mama to buy some things, and I also bought some trifles for the Wolf ladies."[32] Where exactly she went is not clear from this entry, but sometimes she is more explicit, such as on Saturday, 17 April 1830: "At half past twelve I went shopping with Jetje, among others to a seamstress in Zwanenburgstraat."[33] And on Friday, 9 April 1830: "When it was dark, I went with Eduard to [Centier?] to order some things, and since the weather was lovely, we walked through the Kalverstraat again and bought combs for Jetje as we passed by."[34] On Friday, 26 March 1830, Netje and Eduard had to go shopping as far as the Leliestraat:

28 "alwaar het bijzonder vol was van wandelaars en rijdtuigen."

29 "Wij hebben Louis en Mevr. Mendes ontmoet."

30 "[Ik heb] met Jetje eene groote wandeling gedaan op de grachten tot aan de Westermarkt."

31 "Wij moesten op de Achterburgwal een zeer hooge sluis over, toen wij daarop stonden durfden wij niet heen of weder, zo glad was het. Een jong mensch, een weinig stijf, doch zeer beleefd bood als een ware ridder en beschermer van de wegen zich aan om er ons af te helpen. Ik nam het aan en wij gingen de brug gerust af. Ik bedankte hem vriendelijk en wij namen afscheid, doch ik was waarlijk getroffen van die bijzondere beleefdheid en sprak er nog lang met Jetje over."

32 "Ik ben voor Mama uit geweest, eenige dingen koopen en heb ook eenige kleinigheden voor de Wolvinnen gekocht." The "Wolvinnen" were ladies whose familyname was Wolff.

33 "Ik ben om half een met Jetje boodschappen gaan doen, onder anderen bij eene naaister in de Zwanenburgstraat."

34 "Toen het donker was, ben ik met Eduard naar [Centier?] gegaan eenige dingen bestellen en daar het heerlijk weder was, hebben wij de Kalverstraat nog eens wat doorgewandeld en in het voorbijgaan nog kammetjes voor Jetje gekocht."

"I worked a bit in the morning and at half past two I went shopping with Eduard to Kinders, to an embroidery shop in Leliestraat, etc."[35]

The many social gatherings she attended were another aspect of the urban life of Netje Asser. These gatherings, of course, always took place in the better neighbourhoods of Amsterdam, such as the Herengracht. One took place on Tuesday, 2 February 1830: "In the evening, Mama and I went on foot to Teixeira on the old Herengracht. We played a little music and recited poetry. They received us very casually and I had a good time."[36] On Tuesday, 16 February 1830 she and her family went to a big party at the De Vries family:

> In the afternoon we busied ourselves getting dressed up and at eight o'clock Dad, Mom, Eduard and I went to the De Vries family for a big party. We found the group already gathered and immediately took a seat at the gaming table. The room looked very nice and was well lit, but such a party is not very entertaining.[37]

They returned home shortly before midnight. Where exactly this party took place is not clear from this entry, but undoubtedly this party took place in one of the better neighbourhoods of Amsterdam. The guests to the party were probably primarily Jewish, and included Mrs Rachel Mendes, Mr Prins and the gentlemen Sigel.

According to custom the marriage of Netje to her cousin Louis Asser from The Hague, took place in the city where the bride lived. Therefore, the civil wedding of Netje and Louis took place on Wednesday, 27 April 1831, in the Amsterdam town hall.

> We drove to the town hall at half past eleven with three carriages, one from Godefroi, one from Hartog in which Louis and I were, and one from de Vries. We were taken upstairs in the town hall to a room with many paintings and antiquities; I was affected, but less than I thought.[38]

35 "Ik heb wat gewerkt 's morgens en ben om half twee met Edward gegaan boodschappen naar Kinders, naar eene borduurwinkel in de Leliestraat enz."

36 "'s Avonds zijn Mama en ik te voet naar Teixeira op de oude Heerengracht gegaan. Wij hebben daar een weinig muziek gemaakt, gedeclameerd. Zij hebben ons heel ongegeneerd ontvangen en ik heb mij er goed geamuseerd."

37 "Na de middag hebben wij ons met onze toilet beziggehouden en om acht uren zijn Papa, Mama, Eduard en Ik naar de Vries gegaan op een groote party, wij vonden het gezelschap a bijeen en werden dadelijk aan de speeltafel geplaatst. De zaal zag er zeer mooi uit en was goed verlicht, doch overigens is zulke eene party niet zeer amusant."

38 "Wij zijn om half twaalf naar het Stadhuis gereden, met drie equipagies, één van Godefroi, een van Hartog waarin Louis en ik waren en een van de Vries. Wij zijn op het Stadhuis boven

After the ceremony in the town hall, there was a large party with ninety guests in a banquet hall in the so-called Garnalendoelen. This was a hotel on Singel (where the library of the University of Amsterdam is now housed) and which was called Garnalendoelen to distinguish it from the nearby Doelenhotel. The Jewish wedding followed on Sunday, 1 May, and was a slightly more modest happening and took place in the family home on Singel. Only thirty guests attended. According to Netje, "the actual *chuppah* [Jewish marriage] was in the garden. It went all very neat and decent."[39] Then the guests went to the side room where a cold buffet was served. "We stayed at the table for a few hours. It was quite cheerful and casual."[40]

Later that same day, Netje and Louis left for The Hague where they arrived at eleven o'clock in the evening, and where she would live the rest of her life. Netje continued her diary for another year and then stopped writing. In that period, she visited Amsterdam several times. Had she become homesick for her hometown? It is hard to say with certainty as Netje rarely gives us the full story.[41] But somehow you get the impression that she missed Amsterdam. An indication of this longing of Amsterdam is that when she wrote to her family in Amsterdam she noted in her diary "I wrote home." Home for Netje was still Amsterdam.

Hanna da Costa-Belmonte's Amsterdam

From the cheerful Amsterdam of Netje Asser we now turn to the serious and pious Amsterdam of Hanna da Costa-Belmonte. Hers was, as previously mentioned, the Amsterdam of the Réveil. Although Hanna da Costa's social circle was quite different from Netje Asser's, Hanna also belonged to the upper classes of Amsterdam. Amsterdam was also emphatically the background of the numerous visits of Hanna to churches and religious gatherings at private houses. Her church attendance took her to various locations, including the so-called Eilandskerk (Island Church) on Bickerseiland, the Zuiderkerk, the Amstelkerk and the "Grote Fransche Kerk," the Walloon church at Oudezijds Achterburgwal where the Da Costa family had a family

in een kamer gebragt waarin veel schilderijen en antiquiteiten waren; ik was aangedaan, doch nog minder dan ik gedagt had."

39 "de eigenlijke goeppa was in den tuin, het is alles heel netjes en fatsoenlijk geweest."

40 "Wij zijn een paar uur aan tafel gebleven. Het was nog al vrolijk en ongegeneerd."

41 On these so-called "silences" in diaries, see Leonieke Vermeer, "Cheerful Angels Looking Down on Us': Parental Emotions in Diaries about Illness and Death of Infants and Young Children (1780–1880)," *The European Journal of Life Writing* 7 (2018): 135–136.

grave. On 3 November 1822, she noted in her diary: "Went to church on the third of November on Bickerseiland with Parson Kaakebeen, who preached on the seventeenth verse, the last part, of the general Epistle of Jacob."[42] For the baptism of Abraham Curiel Bueno, another Sephardic Jew from Amsterdam who converted to Christianity, they attended the Eilandskerk: "Bueno made his confession to Reverend Van Manen and received the blessed baptism on the twenty-sixth of the same month in the Eilandskerk."[43] The highlights of her life took place in churches, such as the wedding of Hanna's sister Henriette Belmonte with Mathile Jacques Chevalier. "The wedding took place on 6 May 1830. In the afternoon at one o'clock our beloved brother and sister were united in marriage at the town hall, and at three o'clock in the Fransche Grote Kerk [The Walloon Great Church] by Reverend Huet."[44] When Hanna and Isaac's second son, Isaäc Jacob da Costa, died shortly after being born, he was buried in the same "Grote Fransche Kerk." "Our dear second son was buried on 18 March 1826 in the Fransche Kerk, where my dear husband bought a family grave."[45]

For Hanna, as it was for Netje, Amsterdam consisted primarily of the people who lived there and to whom she was connected. On 6 December 1829, Willem de Clercq, like Da Costa a famous writer in that period, came to dine with his wife and children after which there was a social gathering where twenty-five guests attended. "On 6 December [1829] De Clercq, his wife and children came to dinner with us, and in the evening we were 25 of us, among whom, to our great joy and to the glory of God, were Mr and Mrs Gildemeester and their sister."[46]

So far, we have mainly encountered Amsterdam in Hanna's diary as the background against which her life took place. It is only at special moments,

42 "De 3de nov. 1822 op het Bickerseialnd ter kerke geweest bij Dom. Kaakebeen, die gepreekt heeft over het 17de vs., het laatste gedeelte van de algem. Zendb. Jacobi." Dubois, *Dagboekje van Hanna da Costa-Belmonte*, 33.

43 "Bueno heeft zijne belijdenis afgelegd de 22ste september 1824 bij Dom. Van Manen en heeft de gezegende doop ontvangen de 26ste van dezelfde maand in de Eilandskerk." Dubois, *Dagboekje van Hanna da Costa-Belmonte*, 35.

44 "De 6de mey 1830 had de bruiloft plaats; des middags ten één uure werd onze geliefde broeder en zuster in het huwelijk verbonden op 't stadhuis, en om drie uuren in de Fransche Groote Kerk door Dom. Huet." Dubois, *Dagboekje van Hanna da Costa-Belmonte*, 65.

45 "Ons dierbaar tweede zoontje is begraven de 18de maart 1826 in de Fransche kerk, alwaar mijn dierbaar echtgenoot bij deze droevige gelegenheid een familiegraf heeft gekocht." Dubois, *Dagboekje van Hanna da Costa-Belmonte*, 39.

46 "De 6de dec. kwam De Clercq, zijne vrouw en kinderen bij ons eeten, en 's avonds waren wij met ons 25 waaronder, tot ons groote blijdschap en tot verheerlijking van God, waren mijnheer en mevrouw Gildemeester en hunnen zuster." Dubois, *Dagboekje van Hanna da Costa-Belmonte*, 56.

such as a royal visit on 17 September 1831 or the outbreak of a cholera epidemic in August 1832, that we perceive a certain feeling of solidarity with her native city. About the first event she wrote: "On 17 September [1831], our city had the privilege of welcoming within its walls the royal family, princes and princesses. We were at Westendorp and had a really good view of the entire parade. Their stay here has been a great joy for everyone."[47] It is clear from this entry that Hanna was proud that the royal family visited "our city." The same attachment to her hometown we recognize when she reported the arrival of the dangerous cholera epidemic in 1832. "On 14 August 1832 cholera broke out here in Amsterdam. O Lord, the plague is thus in our city."[48] Here, again, Amsterdam is "our city," and she felt a deep sadness on the predicament which befell her native city.

Conclusion

It is clear Amsterdam played an important role in the diaries of both Netje Asser and Hanna da Costa-Belmonte. It was the city where Netje lived most of the time while writing her diary, and both Jewish women were born in Amsterdam while Hanna da Costa-Belmonte spent almost all her life in her hometown. Their diaries give an intimate insight into the life of the privileged in Amsterdam in the early nineteenth century. The diary of Netje shows how she visited the Comedie, took strolls through the city, and shopped. It also illustrates which social gatherings she attended, and how a highlight in her life such as her marriage to Louis, was celebrated in Amsterdam's town hall and in the Garnalendoelen. The diary of Hanna discloses which Amsterdam churches she attended on several occasions such as her regular church visits, but also at the gay and sad moments of her life such as marriage and death.

As for the extent to which the city of Amsterdam impacted and influenced the personal identities of Netje and Hanna, we can conclude that Amsterdam did not play the most important role. Other aspects, such as their belonging to the privileged class of early-nineteenth-century society, their role as a family member, as a wife, a mother, and, especially for Hanna, her religion,

47 "De 17de september had onze stad het voorrecht binnen zijne muuren te ontvangen de koninglijke familie, prinsen en prinsessen. Wij waren bij Westendorp en zagen dus de geheele trein regt goed. Hun verblijf alhier is tot groote vreugde van alle geweest." Dubois, *Dagboekje van Hanna da Costa-Belmonte*, 81.

48 "De 14de augustus 1832 brak de cholera alhier in Amsterdam uit. O Heere, de plage is alzoo in onze stad." Dubois, *Dagboekje van Hanna da Costa-Belmonte*, 97.

were probably far more important for them than the city of Amsterdam. Still, Amsterdam shaped their lives. This became especially obvious from Hanna's diary, in which, during important events such as a royal entry or the arrival of a cholera epidemic, Hanna displayed her affinity with "our city." Although Netje does not write anything like that, she, too, must have considered Amsterdam *her* city.

Bibliography

Baggerman, Arianne, Rudolf Dekker and Michael Mascuch, eds. *Controlling Time and the Shaping of the Self: Developments in Autobiographical Writing since the Sixteenth Century*. Brill, 2011.

Baumeister, Roy F. *Identity: Cultural Change and the Struggle for Self*. Oxford University Press, 1986.

Berg, Hetty. *De gelykstaat der joden: inburgering van een minderheid*. Waanders, 1996.

Bos, Jacques. "Reading the Soul: The Transformation of the Classical Discourse on Character 1550–1760." PhD diss., Leiden University, 2003.

Buijs, Peter. *De geboorte van het moderne ik. Geluk en identiteit in Nederlandse egodocumenten 1500–1850*. Verloren, 2021.

Buijs, Peter. "Ik, Joods?! Een tentoonstelling over egodocumenten in het Joods Museum." *De Boekenwereld* 39, no. 1 (2023): 52–57.

Burke, Peter, and Jan E. Stets. *Identity Theory*. Oxford University Press, 2011.

Da Costa-Belmonte, Hanna, and O. W. Dubois. *Dagboekje van Hanna da Costa-Belmonte*. Groen, 2000.

"Egodocumenten 1814–1914 (repertorium)." http://www.egodocument.net/repertorium-1.html.

Eyffinger, Arthur. *T. M. C. Asser (1838–1913): "In Quest of Liberty, Justice, and Peace."* 2 vols. Brill, 2019

Frishman, Judith. "The Belmonte Women and Their Conversion to Christianity: 'Heil u, geachte vrouw, uit Abrahams zaad gesproten.'" *Studia Rosenthaliana* 32, no. 2 (1996): 198–201.

Meijer, Jaap. *Isaac da Costa's weg naar het christendom: bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van de joodsche problematiek in Nederland*. Joachimsthal, 1946.

Moseley, Marcus. *Being for Myself Alone: Origins of Jewish Autobiography*. Stanford University Press, 2006.

Seigel, Jerrold. *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Harvard University Press, 1989.

Van Eeghen, Isabella H. *Uit Amsterdamse dagboeken. De jeugd van Netje en Eduard Asser 1819–1833*. Scheltema en Holkema, 1964.

Vermeer, Leonieke. "'Cheerful Angels Looking Down on Us': Parental Emotions in Diaries about Illness and Death of Infants and Young Children (1780–1880)." *The European Journal of Life Writing* 7 (2018): 133–150. https://doi.org/10.5463/ejlw.7.265.

About the Author

Dr **Peter Buijs** studied Dutch language and literature at the University of Amsterdam from 1979 till 1987. Since 1987 he has worked part-time in the Jewish Museum in Amsterdam. In addition to his work at the museum, he focuses on the history of mentalities and ideas.

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

10. Clearing the Deck: The Diaries of Skipper Adriaan Doorneveld

Laura van Hasselt

Abstract: Amsterdam skipper Adriaan Doorneveld (1924–2003) meticulously kept a diary for nearly sixty years. The thirty notebooks resemble a ship's log with their concise, businesslike entries. Yet they provide a rare historical perspective on daily life in Amsterdam. Doorneveld lived and worked on the family barge until 1966, when he became a ferry skipper. His life revolved around the waters of Amsterdam, but he also developed a passion for exploring the city on foot and by bike. After his early retirement in 1986, he started visiting Amsterdam's many museums multiple times a week. Doorneveld's diary both served as an external memory aid and as a way to maintain control over his life, clearing life's deck at the end of each day.

Keywords: Amsterdam; towed barge; ferry; museums; routine; twentieth century

Amsterdam skipper Adriaan Doorneveld (1924–2003) kept a diary for nearly sixty years, never missing a day.[1] The diary consists of thirty systematically kept notebooks, most of which cover two years. All entries are written in red ink, with the days separated by a straight blue line. The handwriting remains neat and consistent until the last pages, where it becomes slightly shaky. The first journal begins in 1944, during World War II, and the last one concludes in 2002, shortly before his death. There is an element of the traditional ship's logbook in these diaries, as most entries are businesslike and staccato. There appear to be no literary pretensions and scarcely any

1 Dutch Diary Archive (Nederlands Dagboek Archief) 472, Diaries of Adrianus Doorneveld (1942–2002), inv. nrs. 579–83.

Rensen, Marleen, Leonieke Vermeer, Laura van Hasselt and Ernestine Hoegen, eds. *Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity: Urban Lives*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2025.
DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-10

emotional outpourings. Yet, these diaries provide a unique insight into the daily life of an Amsterdam skipper in the twentieth century. In this chapter, I will explore Doorneveld's diary in two different ways. First, I will examine why he kept such a meticulous diary for nearly all of his adult life. Second, I will analyse the role the city of Amsterdam played in his life, based on these diaries, and how this role evolved over time.

"The diary is a trace of a life, since it records only what its author wishes."[2] Diary scholar Julie Rak reminds us that these notebooks are not to be read as the clear reflection of a life in all its complexity, however tempting that image may be. With every sentence, the diary writer chooses what to record and what to leave unsaid; what to stress and what to ignore. The author shapes his or her own history, subconsciously, more often than not. As historians we are left with only the traces of a life. As tantalizing as this may be, diaries can provide a wealth of historical information. Hidden within diary entries are traces of locations which play a role in the life of the main character. This makes the diary a very valuable, if subjective source of urban history. Doorneveld's diaries thus offer us a view not only of a life, but also of a city and its surrounding waters.

After his death in March 2003, his son Aart (a historian) donated the notebooks to the Dutch Diary Archive in Amsterdam. It is a special collection on more than one level. Firstly, because of the time span: more than half a century of daily recordings of Amsterdam life. Secondly, the journals offer us the perspective of someone from an underrepresented group in the city's historiography, namely an inland skipper. Despite the historic importance of waterborne transport in Amsterdam, little is known about the history of the people who worked in this sector.[3] These diaries offer us a historical perspective on Amsterdam life, viewed from the water. They are supplemented with an unpublished manuscript on the family history by Adriaan Doorneveld and his son Aart, which is still work in progress.[4] Evidently father and son shared the need to document the past.

2 Julie Rak, "The Hidden Genre: Diaries and Time," *European Journal of Life Writing* 7 (2018): 87.

3 Most historical publications on inland shipping in the Netherlands are focused on economic and technical developments, rather than social or urban history. See, for instance, Ruud Filarski, *Tegen de stroom in. Binnenvaart en vaarwegen vanaf 1800* (Matrijs, 2014); Harry de Groot, *Volaan vooruit. Binnenvaart van opdrukker tot duwboot* (De Alk B.V., 1989); Frits Loomeijer, *Een eeuw Nederlandse binnenvaart* (Friese Pers Boekerij, 1988). An interesting exception, about trade unions in this sector: Jojada Verrips, *Als het tij verloopt … Over binnenschippers en hun bonden 1898–1975* (Het Spinhuis, 1991). See also: www.debinnenvaart.nl and www.schuttevaer.nl.

4 Adriaan Doorneveld and Aart Doorneveld, *Van schepenen tot schippers. Een geschiedenis van generaties Doorneveld* (unpublished manuscript, 2024).

Adriaan (officially Adrianus) Doorneveld spent much of his life working and living on the waters of Amsterdam. He was born on 20 December 1924 on the family barge, the *Op hoop van welvaart*, which was then moored in the IJ at De Ruyterkade, opposite the fire station. The barge was nearly thirty-six metres long and six metres wide, and it could carry 274 tons of cargo.[5] From 1947 until 1966, Doorneveld worked as an inland skipper in the Amsterdam area and lived on the family barge. Thus working and living quarters were one and the same place, except for the fact that this location was constantly moving. From 1966 until his early retirement in 1986, he worked as a ferry skipper on the IJ. In that period he lived ashore with his wife and children, in Amsterdam Noord. In his spare time, he wandered through the city for hours, as much as he could. After his retirement, having much more time on his hands, a new way of exploring the city opened itself up to Doorneveld. He continued his long walks and cycling tours, but he now also discovered Amsterdam's many museums. His hunger for knowledge about (art) history was extraordinary. For nearly twenty years, he visited several museums a week. With his combined knowledge of the waters, the streets and the museums of Amsterdam, Doorneveld must have known the city like nobody else.

Keeping Life under Control

The first entry, on 1 January 1944, is neither spectacular nor warlike: "In the afternoon a slight cold, didn't go into town. Had a drink, Frits Gerritsen came by."[6] Unlike most diarists, Doorneveld did not write on the first page why he decided to start keeping a diary. This was a few months before Dutch minister Bolkestein urged people to keep war diaries via a famous Radio Orange transmission, so this cannot have been Doorneveld's inspiration.[7] Perhaps an earlier notebook was lost during the war, or he just did not feel the need to explain himself. This leaves us to speculate about Doorneveld's motives to keep a diary, which no one else in his family did, as far as we know.[8]

5 https://www.binnenvaart.eu/sleepvrachtschip/31857-op-hoop-van-welvaart.html.

6 "'s middags lichte aanval van verkoudheid, niet meegeweest de stad in. Drank gehad, Frits Gerritsen geweest."

7 Vincent Kuitenbrouwer and Huub Wijfjes, "Inleiding. Mediaoorlog. Radio, geschreven pers en propaganda tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog," *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 125, no. 2/3 (2022): 184.

8 According to his son Adri, who did decide to keep a diary himself, after his father's example. Interview, Laura van Hasselt with Adri Doorneveld, 8 October 2024.

French diary scholar Philippe Lejeune identifies four main motives for keeping a diary: to express oneself; to reflect; to freeze time; and to take pleasure in writing.[9] Doorneveld's diaries fall primarily into the third category: freezing time, in the sense of creating a personal archive from lived experience, a kind of external memory. The diary entries are factual in tone and follow a fixed format. For example:

> Saturday, 11 May [1946]. Got up at 8. Washed and changed. Went to A'dam at 11.30. Visited A. Demage and Uncle Gerrit in the afternoon. Saw fleet review at the IJ. Saw Churchill, in a tour boat. Visited Mrs Koopmans and De Jonge in the evening. Went into town the four of us. Went to bed at 12.[10]

Doorneveld made no apparent distinction between the time he got up and the historic event of Churchill's visit to Amsterdam. This is typical of his style of writing. His diary entries follow a strict scheme: starting with the date and wake-up time, and ending with the time he went to bed. What is in between could range from peeling potatoes to picking up a load of coal, from going to the cinema to witnessing a historic event. Doorneveld's youngest son, Aart, recalls: "He really wrote his diary for himself. As a memory aid."[11] The two boys often observed their father writing his diary at the kitchen table, ruler at hand, occasionally verifying details with their mother. Publication was not his aim. His diaries were primarily a form of personal archive.

Lejeune's first two motives for writing a diary—the expression of emotions and self-reflection—do not seem to apply to Doorneveld. Emotions are in fact strikingly absent from his diaries, but for one exception: his engagement period to his later wife, Alberta Hoorn (1928–2012), which will be discussed later. Whether the fourth motive was important to Doorneveld is hard to discern. Did he take pleasure in the activity of writing itself? There seems to be no attempt to use any literary phrases or metaphors, which is perhaps not surprising since Doorneveld had only a little schooling to build on. But these marbled notebooks do testify to a love of writing, in the physical sense of the word. The handwriting is beautifully regular and remarkably legible, always in the same red ink. The numbers of the years at the beginning of each diary are carefully drawn. There are hardly any

9 P. Lejeune, "How Do Diaries End?," *Biography* 24, no. 1 (2001), 106–7.

10 "Zaterdag, 11 mei [1946]. Om 8.- opgestaan. Gewassen en verschoond. Om 11.30 naar A: dam gegaan. 's Middags bij A. Demage en Oom Gerrit geweest. Vlootshow op het IJ. Churchill gezien, in een rondvaartboot. 's Avonds bij Mevr: Koopmans en de Jonge geweest. De stad in geweest met ons vieren. Om 12.- naar bed gegaan." All translations by the author.

11 Interview, Laura van Hasselt with Aart Doorneveld, 14 April 2023.

crossed out passages or visible corrections. Doorneveld's diaries give the impression of pleasure, even pride in the meticulous craft of writing.

In fact these notebooks look so perfect, that the reader gets rather suspicious. Isn't this too good to be true? In fact it is. The collection at the Dutch Diary Archive proves to be the second version of his diary; the draft notebooks having been thrown away. It is Doorneveld himself who gives this away, when he first mentions his "neat-diary" in 1948:

> Wednesday, 21 July. Got up at 7.20. Gathered laundry. Got first letter from Bep [twice underlined—LVH], had a haircut, went to the stock exchange. Had an afternoon nap, went to exchange, wrote up "neat-diary."[12]

The word "neat-diary" ("*net-dagboek*") reveals that we are not reading the original version of this diary. The mention of a *first* letter from Bep (Alberta Hoorn) is another clue: How could he have known at the time that there would be many more letters to come? Doorneveld's sons confirm that there were two versions of each diary. Aart remembers that his father used to buy a set of simple green notebooks at the start of each year. At the end of the year (in this case already in July) he would rewrite these into more expensive hardcover diaries, with red and black marbled boards.[13] These are the ones that ended up in the archive. Since the originals no longer exist, we will never know the differences between the two. But it is important to be aware of the fact that even these unpublished egodocuments have been edited by their author. This was his personal neat-archive; the systematic recordings of a systematic man.

This leads us to a fifth motive for keeping a diary: the diary as an instrument to keep a grip on one's life. Arianne Baggerman et al. explain the growth in autobiographical practices in the nineteenth century by an urge not to freeze, but to control time: "trying to get a grip on an ever faster changing world by writing diaries and memoirs."[14] Also in less turbulent times, there is always a performative aspect to diary keeping. The pure act of recording one's day may contribute to the writer's well-being.[15] To

12 "Woensdag, 21 juli. Om 7.20 opgestaan. Wasboel opgezocht, 1e Brief van Bep gehad [dubbel onderstreept] haar laten knippen, naar de beurs geweest. 's Middags geslapen, naar de beurs geweest, net-dagboek bijgeschreven."

13 Interview, Aart Doorneveld.

14 Arianne Baggerman, Rudolf Dekker and Michael Mascuch, eds, *Controlling Time and Shaping the Self. Developments in Autobiographical Writing since the Sixteenth Century* (Brill, 2011), 4.

15 Desirée Henderson, *How to Read a Diary: Critical Contexts and Interpretive Strategies for 21st-Century Readers* (Routledge, 2019), 160.

Doorneveld, keeping a diary was not just important *while* being a routine, but precisely *because* it was a routine. He wrote in his diary each and every night, even when he was ill or when he came home really late after a night shift. As his oldest son, Adri, says: "He was the kind of person who always does things exactly the same way. That was his way of life."[16] In a sense, keeping a diary was a routine to him no different from brushing his teeth. The day would not be complete without it.

The words "schoon schip gemaakt" ("cleared the deck") appear more than a hundred times in his diaries. Doorneveld meant them literally: clearing the deck is a regular skipper's task. However, it is also a metaphor for cleaning up the mess from the past and making a fresh start. That is what Doorneveld did every night, when he wrote in his diary at the kitchen table: he cleared the deck of his life for the following day.

Amsterdam Seen from the Water (1945–66)

The Doorneveld family spent the last part of the Second World War in hiding, in the village of Schalkwijk near Utrecht.[17] The aim was not just to hide themselves from the Germans but also their barge, the *Op hoop van welvaart*. Like many other inland skippers, they thus tried to avoid confiscation.[18] Although the barge was eventually discovered and used as a munitions ship by the occupiers, at least Adriaan managed to escape forced labour in Germany. Shortly after Liberation Day (5 May 1945), he returned to Amsterdam. Since the barge was still missing, he had to go by bicycle, which must have taken at least three hours.

> Monday, 7 May. Got up at 6.10. Went to Amsterdam by bike, visited De Bruin, Uncle Siebe, A. Demoge and Uncle Gerrit. Told them about what happened the past nine months. Went to bed at 11.10.[19]

16 Interview, Adri Doorneveld. "Hij was zo iemand die heel precies altijd hetzelfde deed. Dat was zijn manier van leven." Translation by Laura van Hasselt.

17 History student Frederike Herkströter examined Doorneveld's war diaries for my diary course at UvA. Frederike Herkströter, "Het 'normale' leven van Adrianus Doorneveld" (paper, University of Amsterdam, 2023).

18 Rudolf Filarski, *Tegen de stroom in. Binnenvaart en vaarwegen vanaf 1800* (Matrijs, 2014), 256–57.

19 "Maandag, 7 mei. Om 6.10 opgestaan. Per fiets naar Amsterdam gegaan, bij de Bruin, Om Siebe, A. Demoge en Oom Gerrit geweest. 's Avonds de wetenswaardigheden van de afgelopen 9 maanden verteld. Om 11.10 naar bed gegaan."

Remarkably, there is not a word about the historic tragedy which happened that day in the heart of Amsterdam. A large crowd had gathered at Dam Square for a supposedly festive welcome of the Canadian troops. Instead, a small group of German marines, who were entrenched in the Groote Club at the corner of Dam Square, started randomly shooting at the masses. In the ensuing panic at least thirty-four people were killed.[20] Doorneveld stayed in Amsterdam Noord with his friends, oblivious of the shooting a few kilometres away. The omission of this important event in the history of Amsterdam reminds us of the limitations of the diary as a historical source. Like King Louis XVI, who famously wrote "Rien" ("Nothing") in his diary on 14 July 1789, the day the Bastille was stormed.[21]

After the war, it took two years for the Doorneveld family to resume work on the Amsterdam waters. They had to wait for the retrieval and repair of their barge, which had been sunk by the Germans. More generally, it took a while for the badly damaged Dutch economy to pick up after the war and the same applied to inland shipping. Adriaan did odd jobs until he got his first ship's load in September 1947. This was clearly an important moment to him, as is apparent from his underlining in the following passage in his diary: "Tuesday, 9 September. Got up at 5.50. Cleared the decks, removed junk from the hold, went to the stock exchange, accepted first trip since the war, cokes from Utrecht to Amsterdam."[22] In the following years, he and his parents transported many more loads of coke, but also sugar, cocoa, peanuts, all sorts of grain, wood, scrap iron—anything that was on offer on the Amsterdam skippers' exchange at the Beurs van Berlage. The Doornevelds worked long hours, often also in the evenings and on Saturdays. They operated in a wide area in north-western Netherlands, mostly to and from the industrial Zaan region.

Amsterdam was their home base. Doorneveld's diaries are filled with the names of the city's quays, docks and harbours: Handelskade, Javakade, Entrepotdok, Oosterdok, Houthaven, Parkhaven, etc. To inland skippers like the Doornevelds, Amsterdam was a city not of streets, but of waterways. On

20 Norbert-Jan Nuij, "Balans van een bloedbad," in *Drama op de Dam 7 mei 1945*, ed. Ludmilla van Santen and Norbert-Jan Nuij (Stichting Memorial voor Damslachtoffers 7 mei 1945, 2017), 190–91. The casualty number includes two German military personnel, but there may have been more German dead.

21 Philippe Lejeune, "'Rien.' Journaux du 14 juillet 1789," in *Le bonheur de la littérature*, ed. Christine Montalbetti and Jacques Neefs (Presses Universitaires de France, 2005): 277–84.

22 "Dinsdag, 9 september. Om 5.50 opgestaan. Schoon schip gemaakt, rommel uit 't ruim gehaald, naar de beurs geweest, ik de eerste reis aangenomen na de oorlog, cocus van Utrecht naar Amsterdam."

and from these waters they made a living. Some people called them "water gypsies."[23] They were wanderers, always on the move. Home was where the barge was, which could be anywhere. And yet they always knew where to find each other. The *Op hoop van welvaart* was usually moored at Houthaven, where it lay next to many other barges. This was one of the most important places for inland waterway skippers to meet. The Beurs van Berlage was another important meeting place, often mentioned in Doorneveld's diaries. He also recorded going to the yearly Skippers' Christmas, first held at the Nieuwezijdskapel at Rokin,[24] later at the Nassaukerk at De Wittenkade, both Protestant churches.

Doorneveld first mentioned Bep Hoorn on 23 April 1948, when he recorded calling her on the phone. She, too, came from an inland skipper's family; they met at the skippers' youth club. After their first phone call, they met regularly and on 3 May 1948 Doorneveld wrote in his diary: "in the evening brought flowers to American Hotel." This still is a well-known hotel on the Leidseplein where Bep worked as a chambermaid.[25] Later that year, she got a job as a cleaning lady at the Binnengasthuis hospital. Doorneveld brought her to work many times. Whenever they could, they went for long walks in Vondelpark or one of Amsterdam's many other parks. Since they both still lived with their parents, it was hard to find any privacy. Public parks were the ideal meeting place for a young couple without a place of their own.

After many walks in the park, Adriaan and Bep got engaged on 6 June 1949, exactly five years after D-Day. Contrary to his habit, Doorneveld included the year in his diary entry, underlined. It signifies how important the engagement day was to him; he knew he was writing history. The diary entry is also exceptional in another sense. After years of seemingly emotionless entries, Doorneveld now showed himself overwhelmed by love and joy, which is not only evident from his choice of words and underlinings, but also from the atypical use of exclamation marks.

> Monday, 6 June. 2nd Pentecost Day 1949. Got up at 8.45. Went to "my Bepske," walked together and went to Westerpark. There got engaged at 11.15!! This was the best moment in our lives until now!!! [underlined thrice—LVH].[26]

23 Interview, Aart Doorneveld.

24 Since 2005 the Amsterdam Dungeon has been situated in a former church.

25 "'s Avonds bloemen naar American-hotel gebracht." Aart confirmed that his mother used to work there.

26 "Maandag, 6 juni. 2e Pinksterdag 1949. Om 8.45 opgestaan. Naar "mijn Bepske," gegaan, samen gewandeld en naar Westerpark gegaan. Daar ons om 11.15 verloofd!! Dit was tot nog toe het mooiste ogenblik in ons leven!!!"

In the years leading up to their marriage, there are recurring lyrical passages about Bep in the diary. Paradoxically, Doorneveld became both more candid and at the same time more secretive when he wrote about his beloved. Many of these passages include one or several crosses, for instance on Saturday, 22 April 1950: "In the evening went to Vondelpark with my sweetheart 'my Beppekind', had xxx for a while with my dearest" [underlined by Doorneveld].[27] The use of symbols in diaries is not uncommon; usually they function as a code for bodily or erotic information.[28] In Doorneveld's diary, the crosses probably refer to some kind of romantic engagement, as he only wrote them down after having spent a happy evening with his fiancée.

The engagement lasted nearly five years, probably due to financial reasons. Both Adriaan and Bep lived with their parents aboard their family barges (respectively, the *Op hoop van welvaart* and the *Disponibel*). It was only after Adriaan's parents had moved to a house in Amsterdam Noord (Urkstraat 39) in March 1953 that he and Bep were able to get married. The wedding ceremony was on 17 March 1953 in Nieuwe Kerk at Dam Square, after which Bep could finally join Adriaan on the *Op hoop van welvaart*.[29] From that day, the lyrical passages and x's abruptly disappear from the diary. But Adriaan stayed deeply in love with Bep, according to their son.[30] He just didn't need an outlet for his romantic feelings anymore, since the object of his love was now every day at his side.

The couple had two sons: Adri in 1956 and Aart in 1961. The family spent most of their time on the water, Bep often standing behind the steering wheel. She was a more confident skipper than Adriaan, who was sometimes nervous about the weather conditions.[31] Maritime historian Ruud Filarski notes that traditional gender patterns did not always apply aboard barges: "Skipper's wives were in many respects more emancipated than their sisters onshore." Not only did they help steer the barge, but many of them also did the financial administration.[32] In addition, male skippers were also more emancipated than their counterparts on land. In our case, Bep did the cooking, but Adriaan participated in maintaining the household in all

27 "'s Avonds samen met mijn schattebout 'mijn Beppekind' naar Vondelpark geweest, nog fijn even xxx gehad met mijn liefste."

28 On the use of symbols in diaries for self-tracking, see: Leonieke Vermeer, "From Diaries to Data Doubles: Self-Tracking in Dutch Diaries (1780–1940)," *Life Writing* 19, no. 2 (2022): 215–40, https://doi.org/10.1080/14484528.2021.1971057.

29 Doorneveld and Doorneveld, *Van schepenen tot schippers*, 110.

30 Interview, Aart Doorneveld.

31 Interviews, Aart and Adri Doorneveld.

32 Filarski, *Tegen de stroom in*, 245.

sorts of ways, as is, for instance, shown by this enumeration in his diary on 16 February 1962: "peeled potatoes, slept, made everything storm-proof, sewed buttons on clothes, made rug around steering seat, got groceries, beat out rugs, pasted in cigar bands for Adri."[33] According to his diary, he must have peeled thousands of potatoes over the years.

Wandering the Streets (1966–2002)

When the barge was docked in Amsterdam, their eldest son, Adri, attended a school for skippers' children.[34] Adriaan, Bep and young Aart usually stayed on the barge, except for weekend outings to the cinema and occasional visits to the Bijenkorf department store at Dam Square. This routine drastically changed in 1966, when the *Op hoop van welvaart* was sold. The family moved to a house at Nigellestraat 84, near Florapark in Amsterdam Noord.[35] Adriaan began working at the Amsterdam ferry. In 1980, he was interviewed by the weekly magazine *Nieuwe Revu* for a short article titled "Three Hundred Times Back and Forth Every Week." In the interview, Doorneveld explained his career change because of his youngest son's allergies.[36] The boy would often have breathing difficulties on the barge, especially when it was transporting a load of dusty grain.[37]

There is no reference in his diary to this or any other motivation to leave the *Op hoop van welvaart*. What does become clear from the diaries is that Doorneveld transported far fewer loads in the early 1960s than in the 1950s. It was a hard time economically for inland shipping throughout the Netherlands, particularly for towed barges. During the harsh winter of 1962–63, Doorneveld had to rely on welfare because many waterways were frozen.[38] Spring brought some relief, but not much. Traditional towed barges such as the *Op hoop van welvaart*, which had no motor of their own and were dependent on tug boats, suffered from the rapidly increasing competition with both truck transport and motorized cargo ships. By 1966, the traditional

33 "aardappelen geschild, geslapen, alles stormvast gezet, knopen aan kleren gezet, kleedje om stuurstoel gemaakt, boodschappen gedaan, kleedjes geklopt, sigarenbandjes ingeplakt voor Adri."

34 At 1e Nassaustraat. Interview, Adri Doorneveld.

35 In 2014, Florapark and Volewijkspark were joined and renamed Noorderpark.

36 "Elke week driehonderd keer op en neer," *Nieuwe Revu* 51, 19 December 1980.

37 Interview, Adri Doorneveld.

38 In January and February 1963, Doorneveld frequently mentions going to "Soc: Zaken" (Social Affairs) to get money.

towing trade was rapidly disappearing from the Dutch waters.[39] Meanwhile, the city of Amsterdam was investing in its harbour industry, and the ferry services were expanding. Thus, Doorneveld's career shift seems economically motivated, besides the health of his youngest son.[40]

Unfortunately, just after the municipal transport company (GVB) had hired several new skippers, including Doorneveld, the tide turned for the Amsterdam ferry services. The opening of the Coentunnel in the summer of 1966, followed by the IJtunnel in 1968, greatly reduced the demand for transport of cars across the IJ by ferry.[41] For Adriaan Doorneveld, this meant he had to wait for no less than twelve years before he was allowed to sail a ferry on his own.[42] On Tuesday 25 April 1978 he could finally write in his diary: "This was the first time I officially sailed as skipper!"[43] Until then, he had sold tickets on the ferry and helped maintain the ferryboats. Having navigated all waters in the wide Amsterdam area, the job was hardly challenging. On the positive side: working conditions at GVB were relatively good, so he had more money to spend and a lot more free time.

Limited to the fixed ferry routes, Doorneveld found new ways to satisfy his wanderlust. He started going for long cycling tours and walks through the city, for hours on end, sometimes with Bep or a friend but usually alone. This was mostly on weekends, and sometimes in the afternoon after a night shift on the ferry. For instance, on Tuesday 6 July 1967, he wrote: "in the afternoon cycled by myself along Piet-Hein, -Handels, -Java, -Sumatra, Erts, -Panama—and Borneoquay, Verbindingsdam, Zeeburgerquay, IJdijk en Orange Locks"[44] This particular cycling route indicates nostalgia for his former life on the water, but his wanderings through the city were far from limited to the waterfront. He explored all the city parks, not just those in the north of Amsterdam, and generally roamed the city wherever and whenever he could. Some of these walks were organized, like in 1975, when the city celebrated its seven-hundredth birthday. Saturday, 19 April: "From

39 Harry de Groot, *Volaan vooruit. Binnenvaart van opdrukker tot duwboot* (De Alk B.V., 1989), 68.

40 Doeko Bosscher, "De oude en de nieuwe stad," in *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam 1900–2000. Tweestrijd om de hoofdstad,* ed, Piet de Rooy (SUN, 2007): 348–51.

41 P. H. Kiers, *Een Eeuw Gemeenteveren* (Stichting Amsterdams Openbaar Vervoer Museum, 1999), 29.

42 D. Bosch, "Amsterdamse gemeenteveren bestaan 100 jaar. 'Soms was het net de marine,'" *De Stem,* 19 December 1997, A2.

43 "Dit was de eerste keer dat ik officieel als schipper gevaren heb!"

44 "'s middags alleen langs de o.a. de Piet-Hein, -Handels, -Java, -Sumatra, Erts, -Panama, – en Borneokade, Verbindingsdam, Zeeburgerkade, IJdijk en Oranjesluizen gefietst" [interpunction Doorneveld].

11. until 15.30 went on a city walk with Lammert v/d Veen, in the context of: 'Amsterdam-700.'"[45]

This was not the first time Doorneveld showed an interest in the city's history. In fact, his bookshelves were filled with history books.[46] As a boy, he did not have the opportunity to attend secondary school. He began working at his parents' barge after primary school, at the age of twelve or thirteen. However, unlike most skippers of his generation, he became an avid reader and he creatively pursued his own higher education, whenever possible.[47] He had broad interests, but most of all the history of Amsterdam. In October 1967, he started an evening course in local history ("A:dam Heemkennis") at the renowned Vossius Gymnasium.[48] Soon after, he subscribed to *Ons Amsterdam*, the monthly local historical magazine. He regularly had the issues bound—organized as he was.[49]

After his early retirement (*vervroegd uittreden*, VUT) in 1986, Doorneveld started a remarkable new phase in his self-education. He developed a great interest in art history, particularly the Dutch masters of the seventeenth century.[50] Before his retirement, he rarely visited a museum. However, as a pensioner, visiting museums in Amsterdam became one of his favourite pastimes. He did not take half measures. The word "museum" is mentioned 983 times in his diaries; the word "*tentoonstelling*" ("exhibition") 883 times—not counting museum visits elsewhere on holiday. In the 1990s he visited at least three exhibitions a week in different Amsterdam museums, sometimes even three a day. He also attended countless lectures in museums and community centres. The topics of these lectures were not exclusively historical: they ranged from Anatolia to Amsterdam's former police stations.[51] Doorneveld was not picky in his choice of museums, either; he must have been inside every museum of Amsterdam, small or big. His favourites, according to the number of mentions in his diary, were the Amsterdam Historical Museum[52]

45 "Vanaf 11.00 tot 15.30 hebben Lammert v/d Veen en ik een wandeling door de stad gemaakt, in het kader van: 'Amsterdam–700.'" Lammert van der Veen was his cousin and good friend.

46 Both sons remember their father reading a lot and owning hundreds of books. Interviews, Adri and Aart Doorneveld.

47 Filarski, *Tegen de stroom in*, 244.

48 He first mentioned this course on 25 October 1967. The final lecture was on 24 April 1968, according to his diary.

49 First mentioned 21 February 1972.

50 Interviews, Adri and Aart Doorneveld.

51 Respectively, 20 January 1992, at the Ons Huis community centre (Mosveld), and 1 December 1993, at the De Gouwe community centre (Beemsterstraat).

52 He first mentions the museum 25 September 1971, when he visited the exhibition *Amsterdamse Stadsportretten*.

and the Rijksmuseum.[53] Just another day in the pensioner's life of Adriaan Doorneveld, Thursday, 27 May 1999:

> Visited Amsterdam Historical Museum, a.o. the exhibition: '*A Cathedral on the Y*' (St Nicolaas Church). After that visited R.M. [Rijksmuseum], the exhibitions:
> '*The 1899 Peace Conference*,' '7 Year Old Children' (photo's), 'The Sea in Pocket Size' (nautical models from the 19th century) [...]. After visited Rembrandt House, saw the exhibition: "Goethe and Rembrandt" (drawings). Then looked up several things in the city, related to: 'Local *History* – Ons Amsterdam.'[54]

This is a typical Doorneveld diary entry: short, factual recordings; no emotions or value judgements. However, the sheer enumeration is impressive, especially considering the fact that it comes from a seventy-four-year-old retired skipper.

"Did Not Get Any Further"

Having read these thirty notebooks, one thing is evident: Doorneveld was constantly on the move in and around Amsterdam, either on the water or on land. Yet his diary kept the same format, for nearly sixty years. Doorneveld was a systematic man. His diary primarily served as an external memory aid, but it was more than that. Writing in his diary was an instrument to keep a grip on life, clearing the deck at the end of each day. On the one hand, he was a restless wanderer and, on the other hand, a man of habits. And he was an Amsterdammer through and through. Doorneveld's Amsterdam evolved from a city of water, to a city of streets and parks, to a city of history and museums. The city always played a central part in his life, and his curiosity to get to know it better never ceased.

The last entry in Doorneveld's diary is of Friday 4 October, 2002, five months before his death. He was already suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

53 First mentioned on 10 April 1950.

54 "Het Amsterdams Historisch Museum bezocht, o.a. de tentoonstelling: 'Een kathedraal a/h Y' (de St Nicolaaskerk) bezocht. Daarna het R.M. bezocht, de tentoonstellingen: 'De vredesconferentie van 1899,' 'Kinderen van 7 jaar' (foto's), 'De zee op zakformaat' (Nautische modellen uit de 19e eeuw). [...] Hierna het Rembrandthuis bezocht, de tentoonstelling: 'Goethe en Rembrandt' (tekeningen) bekeken. Toen in de stad diverse dingen opgezocht, die betrekking hebbende op: 'Heemkennis-Ons Amsterdam.'"

His handwriting, although still neat, had become slightly shaky. But he still used the same red pen as always, writing: "Got up 9.10. Did various things." And then, after a blank: "did not get any further."[55]

Bibliography

Sources

Bosch, D. "Amsterdamse gemeenteveren bestaan 100 jaar. 'Soms was het net de marine.'" *De Stem*, 19 December 1997, A2.

Doorneveld, Adriaan, and Aart Doorneveld. *Van schepenen tot schippers. Een geschiedenis van generaties Doorneveld*. Unpublished manuscript, 2024.

Dutch Diary Archive (Nederlands Dagboek Archief) 472. Diaries of Adrianus Doorneveld (1942–2002), inv. nrs. 579–583.

"Elke week driehonderd keer op en neer." *Nieuwe Revu* 51, 19 December 1980.

Herkströter, Frederike. "Het 'normale' leven van Adrianus Doorneveld." Unpublished essay, UvA, 2023.

Interview, Laura van Hasselt with Aart Doorneveld, 14 April 2023.

Interview, Laura van Hasselt with Adri Doorneveld, 8 October 2024.

Op hoop van welvaart (2003770). https://www.binnenvaart.eu/sleepvrachtschip/31857-op-hoop-van-welvaart.html.

Literature

Baggerman, Arianne, Rudolf Dekker and Michael Mascuch, eds. *Controlling Time and the Shaping of the Self: Developments in Autobiographical Writing since the Sixteenth Century*. Brill, 2011.

Bosscher, Doeko. "De oude en de nieuwe stad." In *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam 1900–2000. Tweestrijd om de hoofdstad*, edited by Piet de Rooy, 348–51. SUN, 2007.

De Groot, Harry. *Volaan vooruit. Binnenvaart van opdrukker tot duwboot*. De Alk B.V., 1989.

Filarski, Ruud. *Tegen de stroom in. Binnenvaart en vaarwegen vanaf 1800*. Matrijs, 2014.

Henderson, Desirée. *How to Read a Diary: Critical Contexts and Interpretive Strategies for 21st-Century Readers*. Routledge, 2019.

Kiers, P. H. *Een Eeuw Gemeenteveren*. Stichting Amsterdams Openbaar vervoer Museum, 1999.

55 "om 9.10 opgestaan. Div. dingen gedaan. niet verder gekomen" (underlined by Doorneveld).

Kuitenbrouwer, Vincent, and Huub Wijfjes. "Inleiding. Mediaoorlog. Radio, geschreven pers en propaganda tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog." *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 125, no. 2/3 (2022): 179–99.

Lejeune, Philippe. "How Do Diaries End?" *Biography* 24 (2001): 99–112.

Lejeune, Philippe. "'Rien.' Journaux du 14 juillet 1789." In *Le bonheur de la literature*, edited by Christine Montalbetti and Jacques Neefs, 277–84. Presses Universitaires de France, 2005.

Nuij, Norbert-Jan. "Balans van een bloedbad." In *Drama op de Dam. 7 mei 1945*, edited by Ludmilla van Santen and Norbert-Jan Nuij, 184–92. Stichting Memorial voor Damslachtoffers 7 mei 1945, 2017.

Rak, Julie. "The Hidden Genre: Diaries and Time." *European Journal of Life Writing* 7 (2018): 85–89. https://doi.org/10.5463/ejlw.7.262.

Vermeer, Leonieke. "From Diaries to Data Doubles: Self-Tracking in Dutch Diaries (1780–1940)." *Life Writing* 19, no. 2 (2022): 215–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/14484528.2021.1971057.

About the Author

Dr **Laura van Hasselt** is a postdoctoral researcher at the Amsterdam Diaries Project and teaches public history at the University of Amsterdam. Her dissertation on Piet van Eeghen (2022) combines urban history and biography. She previously worked as a curator at the Amsterdam Museum.

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

IV.

Digital Lives

DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-pt4

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

11. Diaries, Amsterdam and the Post-Digital

Julie Rak

Abstract: By the late twentieth century, personal computers and the internet had changed how people recorded their lives in diary form. We might assume that because of the digital revolution, paper diaries would disappear. However, studies show that people under twenty-five prefer paper diaries and journals over digital apps. This chapter challenges the notion that analogue belongs to the past and digital to the future. Instead, it explores the "post-digital," where online and analogue technologies coexist. The growing interest in planners, travel diaries and analogue memory keeping should be understood within this framework. Diary studies can connect this trend to the way individuals construct their identities—both shaped by and resisting digital affordances—through analogue creativity and self-improvement inspired by liberal ideals circulating online.

Keywords: travel diaries; social media; analogue technologies; journaling; identity formation

What does it mean to have a life on paper in the twenty-first century? We live in a digital age, and most of us have done so since the 1980s. By the late twentieth century, the advent of the personal computer and the internet had changed how people recorded their lives in diary form. We might assume that in the wake of the digital revolution, recording the details of one's life on paper in diary form will soon be a thing of the past, particularly for people who did not grow up with cursive writing or pens and paper. But such assumptions are not entirely correct. Something much more interesting is happening than the mere disappearance of the diary on paper, or the advent of the online journal as a medium that eradicates what went before it. I suggest that we can understand the use of journaling on

Rensen, Marleen, Leonieke Vermeer, Laura van Hasselt and Ernestine Hoegen, eds. *Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity: Urban Lives*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2025.
DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-11

paper in the wake of the digital turn as part of the "post-digital," a way to name the interdependence of online and analogue technologies.

The explosion of interest on social media in paper planners and journals therefore should be connected to diary studies via a theorization of the post-digital. In particular, paper travel journals about destinations such as Amsterdam are now circulated widely on social media using products such as the Traveler's Notebook series from Japan or the Field Notes series from the United States. The work of Abby Sy (pronounced Ah Bee Cee), an Instagram travel journal designer and influencer who helped to popularize the Traveler's Notebook for journaling. She has written an instructional book called *The Art of the Travel Journal* and extensively documented on Instagram a trip she made to Amsterdam. Her work is a good example of post-digital journaling, showing how to make a travel journal and represent Amsterdam, a popular tourist destination, in analogue journaling techniques.

Before we discuss the work of Abby Sy and her position within the post-digital, it is necessary to discuss the new audience for paper journaling that she addresses: Generation Z and its use of post-digital techniques to connect online and analogue journaling practices. The study of analogue travel journaling should take as its focus not middle-aged or elderly people who grew up with journaling on paper, but a younger generation, often called Generation Z, of people under the age of twenty-five.[1] Although they are often called "digital natives," Generation Z does consume analogue media, too, particularly in cross-platform formats.[2] From Asia to Europe, Generation Z is turning to paper journaling, planning and especially to travel diary writing, and then sharing *some* of that work (but not all of it) in online communities gathering on a variety of social media platforms, including Instagram and TikTok.[3] But why would they do this?

Liberal models of selfhood, and secular practices of self-improvement for its own sake, developed from spiritual journaling to the broader notions of identity making dependent on the development of technologies to keep, manage and conceptualize time, which led to diary keeping.[4] Since the

1 Roberta Katz, Sarah Ogilvie, Jane Shaw and Linda Woodhead, *Gen Z, Explained: The Art of Living in a Digital Age* (University of Chicago Press, 2021), 1–2.

2 Fantavious Fritz and Jasmin Mozaffari, *Gen Z: The Culture of Content Consumptio*n (Ontario Media Development Corporation, 2020).

3 Stacy Dixon, "Instagram: Age Distribution of Global Audiences 2022," *Statista*, https://www.statista.com/statistics/325587/instagram-global-age-group/.

4 Philippe Lejeune, *On Diary*. ed. Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. Kathy Durnin (University of Hawai'i Press, 2009).

eighteenth century, when Benjamin Franklin created a chart to track his daily success at embodying thirteen virtues,[5] journaling has been an important way to record what Michel Foucault called "the care of the self" and its progress.[6] Diary keeping was a process akin to other kinds of journaling for self-development such as the recording of prayers and spiritual experiences, the tracking of habits, or the use of commonplace books for the next two centuries: the two practices have now become interchangeable in scholarly and general discussion.[7]

By the late twentieth century, the advent of the personal computer and the internet had changed how people recorded their lives: in *Cher écran*, Philippe Lejeune notes that diary making was already a digital practice in the late 1990s, just before the explosion of blogging and life logging on the internet would make it possible to record and share the details of one's life with thousands, even millions, of others.[8] As Lejeune researched digitally produced diaries and journals in 1998, he asked himself what the afterlife of print will be, and even of his own body, wondering "what remains of me, if I don't write by hand?"[9] And so, by the late twentieth century, the advent of the personal computer and the internet did change how people recorded their lives. But the change did not involve the loss of paper, not exactly. They are now part of a worldwide practice of journaling, self-help work and planning on paper, by hand, using products such as Japan's Traveler's Notebook or the Field Notes series of the United States, which are friendly to the aesthetics and communities of Instagram, TikTok and YouTube. Just as ebooks actually help to increase the sale and circulation of paper books,[10] I suggest that social media aids in the popularity of material journaling and

5 Benjamin Franklin, *Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay and P. M. Zall. W. W. (Norton & Co., 1986).

6 Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3: The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (Vintage, 1988).

7 Batsheva Ben-Amos and Dan Ben-Amos, *The Diary: The Epic of Everyday Life* (Indiana University Press, 2020); Kylie Cardell, *Dear World: Contemporary Uses of the Diary* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2014); Desirée Henderson, *How to Read a Diary: Critical Contexts and Interpretive Strategies for 21st-Century Readers* (Routledge, 2019); Anna Jackson, *Diary Poetics: Form and Style in Writers' Diaries, 1915–1962* (Routledge, 2010); Madeleine Sorapure, "Screening Moments, Scrolling Lives: Diary Writing on the Web," *Biography* 26, no. 1 (2003), 1–23.

8 Philippe Lejeune, *Cher écran* (Threshold, 2016).

9 Lejeune, *On Diary*, 286.

10 Brandie Weikle, "E-Readers Were Supposed to Kill Printed Books. Instead, They're Booming," *CBC Radio*, https://www.cbc.ca/radio/costofliving/print-books-thrive-despite-e-readers–1.7056731; Michelle Faverio and Andrew. "Three-in-Ten Americans Now Read eBooks." *Pew Research Center* (blog), 6 January 2022; BookNet Canada. "Canadian Book Borrowers in 2023," https://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/research/2024/4/15/canadian-book-borrowers-in–2023.

self-tracking, particularly for teens and young adults who could see online life as overwhelming and prone to surveillance.

As our understanding of the digital turn develops, Lejeune's curiosity about the new world and fears for the loss of the old might at first appear to have come to pass. It could make sense to assume that the practices of diary keeping, scrapbooking or writing anything down on paper will eventually disappear.[11] This is why it is often assumed that recording details of one's life on paper is a thing of the past, particularly for people who did not grow up with cursive writing or pens and paper. But this is not what is happening. Referring to the use of diaries as planners and as personal journals in light of the digital turn, Jo Irons asks, "is the paper diary really dead?" Irons, who co-owns a stationery company, resoundingly answers "no," perhaps unsurprisingly given her choice of work, but then cites statistics which show that people under the age of twenty-five *prefer* paper diaries and journals to digital diary and planner apps.[12] Journaling on paper for writers of any age is most often written about within the fields of health, humanities, education and in science as good for us, whether the goal is therapeutic, educational or professional.[13] Since it is the case that social networking sites such as Instagram and TikTok are favoured by the under-twenty-five Gen Z demographic, there is a connection that should be made between self-care culture and social media technologies in the twenty-first century.[14]

Most of the established journal practices do have their roots in the practices of keeping diaries. Therefore, we should begin an investigation of contemporary diary and journal making with contemporary thinking about diaries and what the body of diary scholarship has to say about the persistence of analogue practices in a digital environment. But here, we do see Lejeune's fear that online modes of diary keeping will supersede

11 Gina Neff and Dawn Nafus, *Self-Tracking* (MIT Press, 2016); Nora Young, *The Virtual Self: How Our Digital Lives Are Altering the World around Us* (McClelland & Stewart, 2012); Alison Attrill-Smith, "The Online Self," in *The Oxford Handbook of Cyberpsychology*, ed. Alison Attrill-Smith, Chris Fullwood, Melanie Keep and Daria J. Kuss (Oxford University Press, 2019); Palina Urban, "From Diary Narrative to the Referential Self: How Questionnaires and Quizzes Reshaped Online Self-Writing," *Media, Culture & Society* 42, no. 5 (July 2020): 777–88.

12 Jo Irons, "Is the Paper Diary Really Dead?," *Ferrotype*, https://www.ferrotype.co.uk/blog/is-the-diary-really-dead.

13 Cynthia Dieden, *Tuesdays in Jail: What I Learned Teaching Journaling to Inmates* (American Library Association, 2022); Anne Whitney, "Writing by the Book: The Emergence of the Journaling Self-Help Book," *Issues in Writing* 15, no. 2 (2005), 188–214; Harriet Wadeson, *Journaling Cancer in Words and Images: Caught in the Clutch of the Crab* (Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 2011).

14 Dixon, "Instagram"; Jack Shepherd, "20 Essential TikTok Statistics You Need to Know in 2023," The Social Shepherd, https://thesocialshepherd.com/blog/tiktok-statistics.

analogue modes, an implicit acceptance of the digital and analogue divide. Much scholarship on the diary follows this logic and accepts that the digital and analogue divide exists and that it is also temporal because it positions paper as the past, and the digital as the future. For example, the organization of the landmark collection *The Diary: The Epic of Everyday Life*, edited by Batsheva and Dan Ben-Amos, represents the print and digital divide in diary making *as* a divide, with one notable exception. For example, one part has three essays dedicated to the travel diary.[15] All of them are about diaries on paper, and they are all diaries or journals from the past. The last part of the collection (on online diaries), has four essays about diaries that are not on paper. Three of these are about born-digital diaries or blogs.[16] But these essays are about diaries that are no longer available online. Even here, what we thought we knew about born-digital diaries, collected in one of the most recent books out there, is itself becoming part of diary scholarship about the past.

Given the tendency of these studies to respect the digital divide, what *is* the future for the digital diary, exactly? Lena Buford in *The Diary* collection looks forward to checking in "in a decade or two" to see what has happened to the digital diary.[17] But Kylie Cardell, in the only essay in *The Diary* collection to discuss multi-platform diary work, already addresses what is happening now: the diary is not purely digital. Cardell's example, the guide for keeping a diary called *Wreck This Journal*, "is an Instagram account, a website, and it can be purchased as a physical book."[18] What Cardell describes is a diary that not only can be accessed in numerous ways, but also it can be purchased that way as well. As we shall see, Cardell's description of a how-to diary form has become the most important way that Generation Z diarists reach their audiences, build community and market products for diary keeping, all at once. The future is already here, and, in interesting ways, it includes the past. The future is post-digital.

15 See Jill Walker Rettberg, "Online Diaries and Blogs," in *The Diary: The Epic of Everyday Life*, ed. Batsheva Ben-Amos and Dan Ben-Amos (Indiana University Press, 2020), 411–24; Lena Buford, "A Journey through Two Decades of Online Diary Community," in *The Diary: The Epic of Everyday Life*, ed. Batsheva Ben-Amos and Dan Ben-Amos (Indiana University Press, 2020), 425–440; James Baker, "GeoCities and Diaries on the Early Web," in *The Diary: The Epic of Everyday Life*, ed. Batsheva Ben-Amos and Dan Ben-Amos (Indiana University Press, 2020), 441–56.

16 Ben-Amos and Ben-Amos, *The Diary*, 411–40.

17 Buford, "A Journey," 435.

18 Kylie Cardell, "From Puritans to Fitbit: Self-Improvement, Self-Tracking and How to Keep a Diary," in *The Diary: The Epic of Everyday Life*, ed. Batsheva Ben-Amos and Dan Ben-Amos (Indiana University Press, 2020), 399.

Florian Cramer's concept "post-digital writing" represents a useful way to think in more general ways beyond the digital and analogue divide.[19] The post-digital intervenes in scholarship on paper and online diary making via several avenues: the emerging research on post-digital publishing in book history studies; new materialist approaches to the study of handwriting,[20] and what April O'Brien calls "thing power" in digital environments, where the broken nature of older technologies (in that we don't use them) highlights their thing-ness.[21] As things, older technologies become visible to us and acquire culturally significant meanings beyond their usefulness. This happens when obsolete technologies such as the record player or the fountain pen become collectible, prized for their design and the nostalgic feelings they can evoke. And, finally, post-digital approaches in the developing study of literary media do not recognize the digital divide and instead posit that the digital and the material literary spheres are intimately connected and work to support each other.[22] According to digital humanities scholar David Berry, "the historical distinction between the digital and the non-digital becomes increasingly blurred to the extent that to talk about the digital presupposes an experiential disjuncture that makes less and less sense."[23] The persistence of practices of writing, drawing and designing on paper—particularly by writers under twenty-five—therefore connects to what Alexandra Dane and Millicent Weber call post-digital book culture, "wherein digital and analogue book technologies exist with simultaneous relevance."[24]

I do not want to lose sight, therefore, of the importance of paper, ink (and even washi tape) at this moment in the history of diary keeping and journaling, because there is something important about their material nature and

19 Florian Cramer, "Post-Digital Writing," in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Electronic Literature*, ed. Joseph Tabbi (Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

20 Adam Wickberg, "New Materialism and the Intimacy of Post-Digital Handwriting," *Trace: A Journal of Writing, Media, and Ecology* 4 (2020), http://tracejournal.net/trace-issues/issue4/05-wickberg.html.

21 April O'Brien, "(Digital) Objects with Thing-Power: A New Materialist Perspective of Spaces, Places, and Public Memory," *Trace: A Journal of Writing, Media, and Ecology* 4 (2020), http://tracejournal.net/trace-issues/issue4/03-obrien.html.

22 Simone Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing, and Selling Books in the Internet Era* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), xiii, 235; Anna Kiernan, *Writing Cultures and Literary Media: Publishing and Reception in the Digital Age* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); Bronwen Thomas, *Literature and Social Media* (Routledge, 2020).

23 David M. Berry, "Post-Digital Humanities: Computation and Cultural Critique in the Arts and Humanities," *Computer Science* (2024), 22. http://arxiv.org/abs/2407.0592.

24 Alexandra Dane and Milicent Weber, "Post-Digital Book Cultures: An Introduction," in *Post-Digital Book Cultures: Australian Perspectives*, ed. Alexandra Dane and Millicent Weber (Monash University Publishing, 2021), 1.

what Karen Barad calls its "intra-action" with our own nature and human identities that produces agency[25] or what Anna Poletti calls "the medium of self-life inscription" within the materiality of print ephemera.[26] Nor do I wish to avoid difficult questions about identity, individuality and neoliberal modes of subjectivity that are present in some journaling practices, with their management technologies of time and the self, and the occasional emphasis on the purchase of a method as the path to self-improvement. And so, does the journal make *us*? Does the travel journal make us into travellers? What are the journal's affordances and how do they affect the meaning we make? To show you what I mean, here is one example: a journal product called the Traveler's Notebook.

The Traveler's Notebook is a system, a lifestyle choice and a set of procedures for living and travelling. The TN, as its users call it, is a notebook with a leather cover, a rubber band, a metal toggle securing a cord, a band to hold the notebook closed and a cord for a bookmark. The system involves many kinds of notebooks, called refills, which can be put between the cover and held with rubber bands to make a notebook. The notebook created by its owner can be assembled in many ways. Special series stickers and other accessories allow a user to personalize their notebooks, and ensure that customers keep buying TN products. A notebook can have a lot of refills or very few. It can act as a travel diary, an appointment diary, a scrapbook, a wallet or a sketchbook. Some refills are designed to act as pockets, while others contain notecards, have two-sided tape for scrapbooking or feature zip pockets that can hold stationary items.[27]

There are many systems like the Travellers Notebook. For example, there are the Plotter, the Hobonichi and the Life Notebooks, all from Japan, the Leuchtturm series from France or the Field Notes series from the US, all popular with users under the age of twenty-five. But the Traveler's Notebook is unique in its storytelling. Here is an example from the English-language Traveler's website, headed "the story of Traveler's Notebook":

> I used to enjoy being by myself. Instead of spending time with others, I enjoyed reading books and listening to music by myself. I had difficulty dealing with people, and I had this uneasy feeling, as I felt I was in a wrong place. [...] One day, I found a notebook. This notebook takes a

25 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke University Press, 2007), 178.

26 Anna Poletti, *Stories of the Self: Life Writing after the Book* (NYU Press, 2020), 54.

27 Traveler's Company, https://www.travelers-company.com.

> simple form, but kind of gave me a sense of freedom. [...] In the end, I realized I was not alone.[28]

The author of the passage is probably Atsuhiko Iijima, the developer of the Traveler's Notebook who designed it for travel, just before the development of Instagram, which also was originally dedicated to documenting travel.[29] The story connects the identity of the user, who feels "out of time" and out of place in the modern world and then connects that identity to the thing. The notebook becomes a way to articulate identity by working on it. It therefore represents an early attempt to connect analogue diary or journal writing with social media by evoking the ideas of the past and of travel in specific ways.

The aesthetic of the TN is bound up with a melancholic evocation of, as opposed to a longing for, a specific kind of past for Japan, one that is meant to take the imaginative traveller who uses the notebook mentally to a place and time where travel was mechanized but not electrified. For Japanese travellers, that would be the period of the Meiji Restoration from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century before World War II, when the imperial shogunate ended and Japan began to be open to foreign travel and influence. One of those influences was that of the steam railway, which came to Japan in the 1870s.[30] The colours and style of TN products are meant to evoke this era as a mental construct. Unlike the Day-Glo colours of J-pop or the kawaii designs that are meant to be cute and childlike, the TN is deliberately muted, like the colours and fabrics found in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century steam train cars and hotels, which sometimes are featured in special TN releases. Paper colours are brown or beige. The emphasis on material that can be scratched and faded is an important part of the look. The special sets of the TN, and the yearly release of stickers based on a theme, combine this melancholic and nostalgic aesthetic with the idea of fantasy. Stickers and stamps are highly detailed and are meant to look older, often with obsolete technology, such as cassette tapes, vinyl records or a Victrola on them. Special TN notebooks and sticker sets evoke this past era of slower, more luxurious travel. The Traveler's Records set

28 Traveler's Company USA. "About." https://travelerscompanyusa.com/about/.

29 Tama Leaver, Tim Highfield and Crystal Abidin, *Instagram: Visual Social Media Cultures* (Polity, 2020).

30 Kawai Atsushi, "Express Train to Industrialization: Japan's First Railway Line," *Nippon.com*, 13 October 2022, https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-topics/b06911/; Stuart Jordan, "Part 1: History of Japanese Railways," *Right Lines*, https://www.gaugemasterretail.com/rightlines-article/history-of-japanese-railways-pt1.html.

evokes a fantasy record label where users can imagine all their favourite songs, while the Traveler's Airline is an invented luxury airline. The Traveler's Hotel set is for a hotel that the TN team made up where, in the instructional material, a traveller has a well-worn yet high quality bed, leather sofa and desk, with no internet and attentive service. The Traveler's Café set has as its core idea: "if you have a cup of coffee and a notebook, you are at the Traveler's Café," which means that even during the pandemic lockdowns, you could "keep on travelling in your mind," another TN tagline. Stickers for this set do not evoke a contemporary café, but one from the early twentieth century. The reason for this set of design choices can be found in the "story" section of the TN site:

> Since it is a fantasy, after all, we put off the question of whether it is realistic or not. It is fun to simply let our imagination run free as if we were traveling with our curiosity. For example, what kind of world would open up if there were TRAVELER'S HOTEL, TRAVELER'S AIRLINES, TRAVELER'S TRAIN, and TRAVELER'S RECORDS?[31]

The actual Traveler's Factory is in fact the original Traveler's store, a non-descript grey building. The idea here is that the "factory" is a destination that manufactures ideas and desires about travel. Travel is part of the point: visitors can bring their TN passport notebook to the factory and get it stamped with a unique stamp: they can also do the same thing at select stationery stores around the world that carry TN products. The Factory is a destination in the analogue world for travel, but it is also meant to function post-digitally as a way to represent travel online.

As the Traveler's story site points out, the TN system was made just four years before the advent of Instagram, a platform originally designed to allow the sharing of photos and stories of travel (the name itself comes from the word "telegram," an older technology that allowed words to travel great distances). But Instagram's popularity does not have to do with photos themselves. It has to do with story making, which is why the TN ecosystem works so well with it. In *Instagram: Visual Social Media Cultures*, Tama Leaver, Tim Highfield and Crystal Abidin point out that Instagram "should be understood as a conduit for *communication* in the increasingly vast landscape of social media cultures."[32] And in the process of becoming

31 Traveler's Company USA, "Traveler's Notebook Limited Set 2022," 9 March 2022, https://travelerscompanyusa.com/travelers-notebook-limited-set–2022/.

32 Leaver et al., *Instagram*, 12.

that conduit, Instagram has altered how we understand and share our experiences. It might seem unlikely that something as materially bound as the TN system would work so well on social media, but it makes sense when we understand that post-digital storytelling requires social media platforms to create communities and make the visual portable and consumable. Social media platforms need material content that can be shared. The ideology of sharing created within some platforms could potentially lead to mental health difficulties, bullying, doxxing and other forms of online danger and damage, particularly in the wake of the pandemic and its effects.[33] Storytelling platforms that the users can control to some extent can allow what Adam Wickberg calls "the brokenness of the tools of communication (pen and paper)" to "[disrupt] the fast logic of the social media feed by drawing users into qualities of slowness and intimacy."[34] Wickberg sees this brokenness as a potential place for community to form.

But how can a community be formed between the analogue and digital? Enter the social media influencer. Although media and cultural influencers predate social media, beginning with YouTube in 2008, social media influencers became vital to the success of digital marketing campaigns and important connections between consumers, products and communities.[35] Some social media influencers attract millions of followers across a variety of platforms. Influencers in the world of stationery and journaling tend to attract followers in the tens of thousands or sometimes the hundreds of thousands but the number of followers matters less than the quality of the community they create and the loyalty of community members. There are literally thousands of TN journalers on YouTube, TikTok and Instagram doing many kinds of stories about travel journaling: some are wordless and are just journal "flip-throughs," some are pedagogical and are meant to teach journaling design, and some just share the experience of travelling and journaling. Some influencers are amateurs sharing their passion for travel and journal design, and a few are professionals who are sponsored by

33 Iyad Jerias Alshawareb and Mo'en Salman Alnasraween, "Cyber Bullying through Social Media among Basic Stage Students at Directorate of Education of the University District/Capital Governorate," *International Education Studies* 13, no. 1 (2020), 104–10; Nitza Davidovitch and Roman Yavich, "The Association between Social Media Use, Cyberbullying, and Gender," *Problems of Education in the 21st Century* 81, no. 6 (2023): 776–88, https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/23.81.776; Allan House Cathy Brennan, eds, *Social Media and Mental Health* (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

34 Wickberg, "New Materialism," 9.

35 Caroline Baker and Don Baker, *An Influencer's World: A Behind-the-Scenes Look at Social Media Influencers and Creators* (University of Iowa Press, 2023), 10–12.

stationery and travel companies. The most successful influencers create and market their own lines of products as part of the work they do. For example, the inventor of the Bullet Journal method, Ryder Carroll, has parlayed his success on social media into a thriving company and a collaboration with stationery product maker Leuchtturm.[36]

Influencers have a vital role to play in the success of social media platforms, but their own success relies on their ability to create new content, to be "authentic" and yet create high-quality work, and to manage their followers and their businesses well. The personality of influencers ultimately is what drives social media communities. My example is the stationery influencer I mentioned at the beginning of the essay, Abby Sy and her travel journal about Amsterdam. Abbey Sy is a professional social media influencer whose main platforms are Instagram, Patreon and YouTube, in addition to some shorts she posts on TikTok. Sy is originally from the Philippines. She lived in the United States and is now based in Berlin, where she is a full-time artist in the disciplines of paper journaling, scrapbooking and art making. Her book *The Art of the Travel Journal* is an educational guide to starting, keeping and sharing a travel journal with many artistic tips for doing layouts provided along the way, including how to manage ephemera, take along art supplies and even plan a trip. Sy includes in the book a spread (which is the name for a journal page with photographs, text, and decoration such as stamps or stickers) about Amsterdam as part of a section called "Remember What You Started," which is about the importance of recalling goals for travel journaling and enjoying the process of both travel and documentation.[37] The spread includes many of the elements Sy discusses in her book, including lettering, designing a colour palette connected to the destination and use of mixed media. The journal "within" a journal book is one node of Sy's trip to Amsterdam within a post-digital system. Sy's YouTube video about her trip to Amsterdam is another part of the system.

Sy's video is part of her "Travel and Journal with Me" series, posted on 23 July 2023. The first part of the video has no voice-over, and uses captions to track Sy's trip to Amsterdam and her activities there. The intent is to provide a backdrop for viewers to do their own journaling work using the aesthetics of ambient video, meant to relax a viewer or play in the background. The effect is to create a journaling meet-up, where a viewer could imagine that

36 Bullet Journal, "The Bujo Backstory," https://bulletjournal.com/pages/story.

37 Abbey Sy, *The Art of the Travel Journal: Chronicle Your Life with Drawing, Painting, Lettering, and Mixed Media: Document Your Adventures, Wherever They Take You* (Quarry Books, 2022), 112.

they are with Sy journaling. Since Sy uses TN notebooks, this is another example of journaling in one's mind.

The video opens with the journey from the airport. We arrive in Keukenhof, a location outside Amsterdam, where Sy takes in the Tulip Festival. Then Sy goes to the city and visits the Rijksmuseum, the Van Beek art supply store, and has coffee at an outdoor café. Throughout, Sy includes captions about what she sees and how she feels. She films herself journaling at several cafes, and writes in one of them at 4:29, "In some way, I realized this is the kind of travelling I enjoy. One that enables me to take my time and absorb everything around me through drawing."[38] There are many shots of Sy's journal as she designs it, and after she is finished, so that viewers can have the same experience of slow absorption and creation, perhaps as they work on their own journals. The segment ends at 4:33 with the caption "Actual footage of me being so happy and at peace. I've always just dreamed of being able to travel here" in front of the Van Gogh museum. At 4:52 the pace changes and the video is shot top-down at a desk, where there is a pile of stationery items. The music stops, and Sy says, "Hello from this huge pile of things" as an introduction to her stationery haul from Amsterdam and her journaling techniques. Sy shares ephemera that she picked up, such as a map from the Moco museum. The rest of the video consists of Sy discussing how she creates designs and demonstrating them. Sy presents herself as personable, a trusted professional who can communicate the experience of travelling and journaling. In this way, Sy can show she is authentic (she tells you how she made her journals) while she promotes her latest product, which at the time was her forthcoming book. Here, journaling is not only a material practice but also a post-digital practice, combining the material nature of travel and journaling with a digital sharing. The body of the influencer literally acts as a hinge between the materiality of travel to Amsterdam and the act of digital sharing. Sy only shares the experiences that she wants to share, making her version of a post-digital system intimate but not confessional.

The idea of the secret self that develops without reference to what others might think or say came to be through the practice of diary writing itself, connecting the idea of the self in time to other developing technologies of time and self management. Benjamin Franklin's idea of tracking his life was another aspect of this movement to examine and in effect grow the self, without reference to others. Today, it is hard to imagine living without planning and travelling without documentation. Contemporary life requires

38 Abbey Sy, "Travel and Journal with Me: An Artsy Weekend in Amsterdam," *YouTube*, 23 July 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_69qD6Ofz5E.

all of us to become little CEOs of our lives (I use that metaphor deliberately because of the neoliberal push to plan) in order to pay bills, partition our time into bits and generally become "Franklinized." But the other dimension of diary making—its insistence on the materials of its production and the spaces it offers for creativity and reflection, persist, and they have new roles to play as people navigate and sometimes resist what the CEOs of the digital world want us to do, which is to become more involved in it. Paper lives *are* lives, in Amsterdam and in many other places around the world, and from what I have seen so far, the journal still helps many people to flourish, in the offline world and the online world, on paper, by hand.

Bibliography

Alshawareb, Iyad Jerias, and Mo'en Salman Alnasraween. "Cyber Bullying through Social Media among Basic Stage Students at Directorate of Education of the University District/Capital Governorate." *International Education Studies* 13, no. 1 (2020): 104–10.

Atsushi, Kawai. "Express Train to Industrialization: Japan's First Railway Line." *Nippon.com*, 13 October 2022. https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-topics/b06911/.

Attrill-Smith, Alison. "The Online Self." In *The Oxford Handbook of Cyberpsychology*, edited by Alison Attrill-Smith, Chris Fullwood, Melanie Keep and Daria J. Kuss. Oxford University Press, 2019.

Baker, Caroline, and Don Baker. *An Influencer's World: A Behind-the-Scenes Look at Social Media Influencers and Creators*. University of Iowa Press, 2023.

Baker, James. "GeoCities and Diaries on the Early Web." In *The Diary: The Epic of Everyday Life*, edited by Batsheva Ben-Amos and Dan Ben-Amos, 441–56 (Indiana University Press, 2020).

Barad, Karen. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Duke University Press, 2007.

Ben-Amos, Batsheva, and Dan Ben-Amos. *The Diary: The Epic of Everyday Life*. Indiana University Press, 2020.

Berry, David M. "Post-Digital Humanities: Computation and Cultural Critique in the Arts and Humanities." *Computer Science* (2024). http://arxiv.org/abs/2407.05922.

BookNet Canada. "Canadian Book Borrowers in 2023." 15 April 2024. https://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/research/2024/4/15/canadian-book-borrowers-in–2023.

Buford, Lena. "A Journey through Two Decades of Online Diary Community." In *The Diary: The Epic of Everyday Life*, edited by Batsheva Ben-Amos and Dan Ben-Amos, 425–40. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020.

Bullet Journal. "The Bujo Backstory." https://bulletjournal.com/pages/story.

Cardell, Kylie. *Dear World: Contemporary Uses of the Diary*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2014.

Cardell, Kylie. "From Puritans to Fitbit: Self-Improvement, Self-Tracking and How to Keep a Diary." In *The Diary: The Epic of Everyday Life*, edited by Batsheva Ben-Amos and Dan Ben-Amos, 399–410. Indiana University Press, 2020.

Cramer, Florian. "Post-Digital Writing." In *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Electronic Literature*, edited by Joseph Tabbi, 361–69. Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.

Dane, Alexandra, and Milicent Weber. "Post-Digital Book Cultures: An Introduction." In *Post-Digital Book Cultures: Australian Perspectives*, edited by Alexandra Dane and Millicent Weber, 1–8. Monash University Publishing, 2021.

Davidovitch, Nitza, and Roman Yavich. "The Association between Social Media Use, Cyberbullying, and Gender." *Problems of Education in the 21st Century* 81, no. 6 (2023): 776–88. https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/23.81.776.

Dieden, Cynthia. "Tuesdays in Jail: What I Learned Teaching Journaling to Inmates." *Booklist*, 1 September 2022.

Dixon, S. "Instagram: Age Distribution of Global Audiences 2022." *Statista*, 25 November 2022. https://www.statista.com/statistics/325587/instagram-global-age-group/.

Faverio, Michelle, and Andrew Perrin. "Three-in-Ten Americans Now Read e-Books." *Pew Research Center* (blog), 6 January 2022. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/01/06/three-in-ten-americans-now-read-e-books/.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3: The Care of the Self*. Translated by Robert Hurley. Vintage, 1988.

Franklin, Benjamin. *Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography*. Edited by J. A. Leo Lemay and P. M. Zall. W. W. Norton & Co., 1986.

Fritz, Fantavious, and Jasmin Mozaffari. *Gen Z: The Culture of Content Consumption*. Ontario Media Development Corporation, 2020.

Henderson, Desirée. *How to Read a Diary: Critical Contexts and Interpretive Strategies for 21st Century Readers*. Routledge, 2019.

House, Allan, and Cathy Brennan, eds. *Social Media and Mental Health*. Cambridge University Press, 2023.

Irons, Jo. "Is the Paper Diary Really Dead?" *Ferrotype*, 3 May 2019. https://www.ferrotype.co.uk/blog/is-the-diary-really-dead.

Jackson, Anna. *Diary Poetics: Form and Style in Writers' Diaries, 1915–1962*. Routledge, 2010.

Jordan, Stuart. "Part 1: History of Japanese Railways." *Right Lines*. https://www.gaugemasterretail.com/rightlines-article/history-of-japanese-railways-pt1.html.

Katz, Roberta, Sarah Ogilvie, Jane Shaw and Linda Woodhead. *Gen Z, Explained: The Art of Living in a Digital Age*. University of Chicago Press, 2021.

Kiernan, Anna. *Writing Cultures and Literary Media: Publishing and Reception in the Digital Age*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.

Leaver, Tama, Tim Highfield and Crystal Abidin. *Instagram: Visual Social Media Cultures*. Polity, 2020.

Lejeune, Philippe. *Cher écran*. Threshold, 2016.

Lejeune, Philippe. *On Diary*. Edited by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, translated by Kathy Durnin. University of Hawai'i Press, 2009.

Murray, Simone. *The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing, and Selling Books in the Internet Era*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018.

Neff, Gina, and Dawn Nafus. *Self-Tracking*. MIT Press, 2016.

O'Brien, April. "(Digital) Objects with Thing-Power: A New Materialist Perspective of Spaces, Places, and Public Memory." *Trace: A Journal of Writing, Media, and Ecology* 4 (2020). http://tracejournal.net/trace-issues/issue4/03-obrien.html.

Poletti, Anna. *Stories of the Self: Life Writing after the Book*. NYU Press, 2020.

Rettberg, Jill Walker. "Online Diaries and Blogs." In *The Diary: The Epic of Everyday Life*, edited by Batsheva Ben-Amos and Dan Ben-Amos, 411–24 (Indiana University Press, 2020).

Shepherd, Jack. "20 Essential TikTok Statistics You Need to Know in 2023." *The Social Shepherd*, 3 January 2023. https://thesocialshepherd.com/blog/tiktok-statistics.

Sorapure, Madeleine. "Screening Moments, Scrolling Lives: Diary Writing on the Web." *Biography* 26, no. 1 (2003): 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2003.0034.

Sy, Abbey. *The Art of the Travel Journal: Chronicle Your Life with Drawing, Painting, Lettering, and Mixed Media: Document Your Adventures, Wherever They Take You*. Quarry Books, 2022.

Sy, Abbey. "Travel and Journal with Me: An Artsy Weekend in Amsterdam." *YouTube*, 23 July 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_69qD6Ofz5E.

Thomas, Bronwen. *Literature and Social Media*. Routledge, 2020.

Traveler's Company. https://www.travelers-company.com.

Traveler's Company USA. "About." https://travelerscompanyusa.com/about/.

Traveler's Company USA. "Traveler's Notebook Limited Set 2022." 9 March 2022. https://travelerscompanyusa.com/travelers-notebook-limited-set–2022/.

Urban, Palina. "From Diary Narrative to the Referential Self: How Questionnaires and Quizzes Reshaped Online Self-Writing." *Media, Culture & Society* 42, no. 5 (July 2020): 777–88.

Wadeson, Harriet. *Journaling Cancer in Words and Images: Caught in the Clutch of the Crab*. Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 2011.

Weikle, Brandie. "E-Readers Were Supposed to Kill Printed Books. Instead, They're Booming." *CBC Radio*, 17 December 2023. https://www.cbc.ca/radio/costofliving/print-books-thrive-despite-e-readers–1.7056731.

Whitney, Anne. "Writing by the Book: The Emergence of the Journaling Self-Help Book." *Issues in Writing* 15, no. 2 (2005): 188–214.

Wickberg, Adam. "New Materialism and the Intimacy of Post-Digital Handwriting." *Trace: A Journal of Writing, Media, and Ecology* 4 (2020). http://tracejournal.net/trace-issues/issue4/05-wickberg.html.

Young, Nora. *The Virtual Self: How Our Digital Lives Are Altering the World around Us.* McClelland & Stewart, 2012.

About the Author

Julie Rak (FRSC) is HM Tory Chair in the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta, Canada. She has written books, collections and articles about nonfiction. Her current work is about journaling and the post-digital turn.

12. Mapping Urban Spaces through Personal Stories: Story Maps and Deep Maps of Amsterdam

Helga Lenart-Cheng

Abstract: Situated at the intersection of life writing studies, urban studies, geomedia and media studies, this chapter explores the practice of "personal story mapping." Its recent upsurge is owed to the rise of social media and the spectacular advance of mapping technologies. According to its proponents, this democratized, narrative re-mapping of our spaces promises to be more participatory and dynamic than our previous mapping practices. This emergent "cartography of intimate narratives" indeed presents a positive alternative to the segregating dynamics of Cartesian geographic traditions, but only if we acknowledge these emerging technologies' own conflicting epistemologies. This chapter traces the emergence of story mapping from the early 2000s to today, using two Amsterdam-based case studies: Amsterdam RealTime (2002) and the Amsterdam Diaries Time Machine (2024).

Keywords: digital cartography; narrative geography; participatory media; geospatial storytelling; life writing technologies; locative media

Amsterdam RealTime

Amsterdam RealTime (ART), launched in 2002, was a pioneering project aimed at providing real-time data visualization of Amsterdam's urban life. The project was developed by the Dutch institute Waag, a "futurelab for technology and society."[1] The basic idea was simple: Waag, along with artists

1 Waag Futurelab. "What Is Waag?," https://waag.org/en/about-waag. ART is my own abbreviation. I am grateful to Marleen Stikker, founder and executive director of Waag Futurelab, for meeting with me to discuss this project.

Rensen, Marleen, Leonieke Vermeer, Laura van Hasselt and Ernestine Hoegen, eds. *Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity: Urban Lives*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2025.
DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-12

Esther Polak and Jeroen Kee, asked seventy-five volunteers to carry a tracer unit, a portable device equipped with GPS capabilities. Over a two-month period, these tracers determined participants' precise geographical positions which were then visualized against a black backdrop, resulting in intriguing traces and lines that formed a new kind of city map. Organizers called it a "diary in traces," and a "psychogeographic experience,"[2] noting that unlike conventional maps, this representation did not feature street names or buildings; instead, it depicted the organic movements of real individuals. They also added a participatory element in that other citizens could access and engage with the real-time data both online and as part of the *Maps of Amsterdam 1866–2000* exhibition in the Amsterdam City Archive. As the website explains:

> The project provided visitors of the exhibition with a special experience: having just seen 150 years of cartography, which has always been influenced by technology and the cartographer's vision, the visitor was exposed to a contemporary live version of that very same Amsterdam, created with today's technology.[3]

Numerous critics have since analysed ART from various perspectives, praising its pioneering use of GPS technologies while also questioning its naiveté in ignoring the darker sides of surveillance and biopower.[4] Now that more than twenty years have passed, I propose to reexamine this project in the context of the changing landscape of locative media, big data and deep maps. My perspective combines a humanities emphasis on the importance of storytelling and temporality in interpretation, with an interest in the political potential of collectively mapping our everyday lives. I am most interested in how such collective "diaries in traces" can shape our identity

2 Waag Futurelab, "Amsterdam RealTime," https://waag.org/en/project/amsterdam-realtime. See also polakvanbekkum, "AmsterdamREALTIME—Polakvanbekkum," 2 May 2002, https://www.polakvanbekkum.com/works/amsterdamrealtime/. The original Flash website, with the mapping in progress, can be viewed as an ~18 min. video on the polakvanbekkum site. The complete press coverage and exhibition history is archived on "Stack-Share."

3 Waag, "Amsterdam RealTime—Dagboek in Sporen." http://realtime.waag.org/en_index.html.

4 See, for instance, Ned Prutzer, "Examining Amsterdam RealTime: Blueprints, the Cartographic Imaginary and the Locative Uncanny," *InVisible Culture* 23 (2015), https://doi.org/10.47761/494a02f6.596ef017; Ellen Mueller, "Interview with Esther Polak," 4 February 2024, https://ellenmueller.com/interview-with-esther-polak/; and Amy D. Propen, "Critical GPS: Toward a New Politics of Location," *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 4, no. 1 (2005): 131–44, https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v4i1.731.

Fig. 12.1. Amsterdam RealTime (2002) Ester Polak, Jeroen Kee and Waag Futurelab. Participatory mapping project and installation; this image depicts a composite of GPS traces produced by participants (courtesy of Ester Polak).

narratives, both as individuals and collectives. Given that maps are not just representations of space but means of producing space, these mapping projects do carry the potential to transform our spaces and collectives. However, to reach this potential it is imperative that we do not present these bottom-up, citizen initiatives as alternatives to top-down mapping and corporate surveillance practices. Instead, we should acknowledge the productive tension inherent in their shared histories and competing epistemologies. In short, I am proposing a double-pronged approach which acknowledges the transformative effects of map making while tempering overly enthusiastic celebrations of the imaginative remaking of our urban spaces. One way to do so is to highlight the role of storytelling in refiguring spaces, because storytelling involves a mediation of experience that is always open-ended and in need of interpretation. Therefore, in the second half of

the chapter, I will explore story maps and deep maps that place a greater emphasis on the connection between mapping and storytelling.

ART: Historical, Technological and Ideological Context

In 2000, the US government's decision to increase the accuracy of GPS data available to civilian users prompted an immediate reaction from artists and activists around the world. British artist Jeremy Wood, for example, started recording his journeys with GPS, creating a "form of personal cartography that documents [his] life as a visual journal."[5] The idea of course was not new. In fact, as the French philosopher Michel de Certeau observed, historically, the very first maps were logs of journeys rather than bird's-eye view representations, so they were more like narratives. Over centuries, as maps became increasingly abstract and static, they adopted an aerial perspective. In a way, GPS tracing returned us to the origins of mapping, promising a more democratic, dynamic, travelling and transgressive perspective.

As part of this exciting turn toward citizen mapping initiatives, ART drew inspiration from two earlier movements. The first one was the method called *dérive* promoted by the situationists in the 1960s. In response to the feeling that their sense of place was vanishing in a capitalist society, the Situationists sought to re-inhabit space in new ways. Their method involved mapping-while-wandering, and Guy Debord's *The Naked City* inspired many artists to disrupt existing representations of the city. To only mention one Amsterdam-based project from this period, in 1970 Stanley Brouwn created Steps, part of a "project of documenting his walks through various terrains," which

> traces a route he took in Amsterdam. The map is a skeletal indication of his path through a city that is not laid out on a grid but shaped by a meandering series of concentric canals and avenues eddying out from its centre. In a series of walks through the city, Brouwn economically deployed his body to trace a path in space and time.[6]

5 "GPS Maps 2008," http://www.gpsdrawing.com/maps.html.

6 The Museum of Modern Art, "Stanley Brouwn. *Steps*, 1970," https://www.moma.org/collection/works/109539.

This phenomenological approach accentuates the embodied experience of the map maker and the spatially and temporally located, singular moment when the map is being formed.

Another important historical antecedent was the cartographic trend from the 1960s known as "mental mapping."[7] Simply put, "mental maps" (also referred to as "psychological maps," "cognitive maps" or "imagined maps") are visual representations of the maps that individuals carry in their minds. Cognitive scientists proposed that these mental maps had important social functions as well. As Stanley Milgram observed,

> The image of the city is not just extra mental baggage; it is the necessary accompaniment to living in a complex and highly variegated environment. [...] People make many important decisions based on their conception of a city, rather than the reality of it.[8]

This recognition sparked numerous studies and projects, and mental mapping emerged as a popular method to demonstrate the role of individual perception in interpreting space.[9] Organizers of ART clearly drew on this tradition when they wrote: "Every citizen of Amsterdam carries an invisible map of the city in his head. The way he or she moves through the city is determined by this *mental map*. Amsterdam RealTime in 2002 visualized those maps."[10]

Over the next decade, thousands of similar locative projects popped up around the world. Like ART, many of them sought to map or "self-map" cities. Some of these focused on the trajectories of single individuals, others aggregated the daily routes of many. For example, the project Invisible Cities, created by Christian Marc Schmidt and Liangjie Xia, exemplified a new generation of dynamic story maps that visualized social networks in urban spaces. It used real-time Twitter, Instagram and Flickr data to map cities, aiming to capture the collective memory linked to specific locations. As data accumulated, the map's terrain transformed, illustrating high and low data density areas over twenty-four hours. This project created a narrative from

7 The idea of mental mapping was first proposed by Kevin Lynch in *The Image of the City* (MIT Press, 1960).

8 Milgram, Stanley. 1977. *The Individual in a Social World: Essays and Experiments*. Addison-Wesley Series in Social Psychology. Addison-Wesley Pub. Co. 89.

9 Such "low-tech" physical illustrations of people's mental maps are still popular today; see, for example, the Mapping Manhattan project in Becky Cooper and Adam Gopnik, *Mapping Manhattan: A Love (and Sometimes Hate) Story in Maps by 75 New Yorkers* (Abrams, 2013).

10 Waag Futurelab, "Amsterdam RealTime."

social interactions, offering an immersive three-dimensional experience that allowed users to see how their data contributions reshaped the space. Similarly to ART, Invisible Cities encouraged participants to engage with their data, fostering collective bonds.

In the beginning, most of these projects remained limited to art technology festivals and museum spaces. After 2008, however, with the launch of Apple's GPS-enabled iPhone and the rise of social media, locative media became a ubiquitous element of daily life. As technologies blurred the line between the physical and the virtual, a "new visual regime"[11] came to dominate everyday life: from mashups, crowd maps and participatory geographic information systems (PGIS), through location-based services (LBS) and locative mobile social networks (LMSN), all the way to the algorithmic construction of space and mixed realities. At first, many celebrated the grassroots potential of these new technologies. For example, participatory mapping[12] has been successfully used for a wide range of community projects, political activism, citizen science projects and even crisis management. Artistic projects like ART also proliferated, and people today continue to play with their own data to try to rewrite the landscapes they traverse. Just recently the *New York Times* reported on how runners and cyclists use "fitness apps and the power of live satellite tracking [...] to draw hearts, animals, birthday wishes—and even homages to Vermeer—across their local landscapes."[13]

Meanwhile, locative media came increasingly under attack as people realized the deep enmeshment of geolocation with societies of control. As people began to constantly share their location (whether voluntarily, involuntarily, inadvertently or ambiently) and location data became part of valuable big data, critics started calling attention to the exploitation and injustices resulting from data bias and the lack of data privacy involved in geolocation. The potential abuse of location data has of course always been part of the game. Again, artists were among the first to not just play with GPS but to also highlight its subversive, disruptive capabilities. For

11 Cornelia Brantner, "New Visualities of Space and Place: Mapping Theories, Concepts and Methodology of Visual Communication Research on Locative Media and Geomedia," *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 13, no. 2 (2018), https://doi.org/10.16997/wpcc.290.

12 In participatory mapping, the process whereby maps are created is as valuable as the maps themselves, meaning that the fact that community members work out a spatial representation *together* is of value by itself.

13 Claire Fahy, "Runners and Cyclists Use GPS Mapping to Make Art," *New York Times*, 24 September 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/24/technology/gps-art-strava-running.html. See also the app Human and its map of cyclists in Amsterdam.

example, Kanarinka's "It Takes 154,000 Breaths to Evacuate Boston" (2007) involved running the city's evacuation routes to measure distance in breaths. "The project [was] an attempt to measure our post-9/11 collective fear in the individual breaths that it takes to traverse these new geographies of insecurity."[14] Another "dislocative" project, Julian Oliver's Border Bumping used cellular data to redraw country borders based on cell tower switches, highlighting the hidden technological infrastructures that shape our lives.[15]

As many locative art projects deployed GPS to "dislocate" and thereby challenge conventions, some accused ART of not addressing, or not addressing explicitly enough, the threat of surveillance.[16] Esther Polak, the artist behind ART, was confronted in an interview with the fact that locative media always points in two directions: "the potential for enriching the experience of shared physical spaces, but also fostering the possibility to locate," i.e. track down anyone wearing such a device. This turns the "locative media" movement into something of an avant-garde of the "society of control."[17] Polak was then pressed to consider whether ART was as politically and socially critical as it could have been. Polak acknowledged the threat but relegated it to a "secondary" role. She said:

> It's true that many people interpret the project this way. That is fine, because it is an important element, but for me it is secondary. [...] With Amsterdam RealTime [...] the main goal was to give people a sense of their own perceptions. We did not want visitors to adopt the "surveillance" perspective or the voyeuristic gaze, we wanted them to try to identify as much as possible with the participants.[18]

One could argue that the fact that ART was presented as part of a municipal exhibit about the illustrious history of Dutch cartography further

14 Catherine d'Ignazio, "It Takes 154,000 Breaths to Evacuate Boston," *Kanarinka*, 1 November 2009, http://www.kanarinka.com/project/it-takes–154000-breaths-to-evacuate-boston/.

15 Julian Oliver, "Border Bumping," 1 March 2012, https://julianoliver.com/projects/border-bumping/.

16 Prutzer, "Examining Amsterdam RealTime."

17 Annet Dekker, "Traversing the Route: From MediaMarkt to Cameroon" [interview with Esther Polak], in *Navigating e-Culture*, ed. Cathy Brickwood and Annet Dekker (Virtueel Platform, 2009), 61, https://catalogus.boekman.nl/pub/P09-133-7.pdf. See also Coco Fusco, "Questioning the Frame: Thoughts about Maps and Spatial Logic in the Global Present," *In These Times*, 16 December 2004, https://inthesetimes.com/article/questioning-the-frame, which argued that early locative media ignored oppressive structures and excluded marginalized communities' experiences.

18 Dekker, "Traversing," 54.

downplayed its subversive potential. Moreover, the city of Amsterdam was one of the earliest adopters of the "smart city" concept, and this commitment to data-driven intelligent city design might have also potentially overshadowed concerns over data control.

The point, however, is not to establish a dichotomy between institutional or commercial mapping efforts, on the one hand, and citizen-driven grassroots projects, on the other. In fact, it would be a mistake to view top-down exploitation and bottom-up liberation as a binary. Instead, we should emphasize the complex ways in which these elements interact in communicative capitalism and surveillance capitalism.[19] As people supply and curate their own location data, they become both users and producers, creating the hybrid category of "produsers" who craft their identity narratives within networks influenced by market dynamics, political interests and the materiality of emerging technologies. Their act of geolocating or self-tracing thus serves diverse, even competing interests, which blur traditional lines between creativity and disruption, passive compliance and active subversion.[20] Furthermore, geolocative surveillance can easily be converted into soft surveillance and internalized as "sousveillance." In this scenario, people track their own location not because they are being told but because they are genuinely convinced that it is in their best personal and collective interest to do so.

ART is a perfect example of this enmeshment of top-down and bottom-up perspectives. First, it is clear that no such project is ever a tabula rasa: organizers' comments about how they started with a "blank" page without city streets being marked is misleading in that it conceals the fact that people's movements are always already influenced by preexisting physical, social and mental structures, and that even the most subversive mapping projects operate with inherited geographical conventions.[21] Polak actually adopted the positivist epistemology characterizing much of traditional cartography when she evoked the ideal of completeness and accuracy, suggesting that

19 On "communicative capitalism," see Jodi Dean, *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive* (Polity, 2010); on "surveillance capitalism" see Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (Public Affairs, 2019).

20 See Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (NYU Press, 2013); Anna Poletti and Julie Rak, eds, *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2014).

21 See Lefebvre's and Soja's critical comments about the overemphasis on the imaginative and mental aspects of mapping in Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Blackwell, 1991) and Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Blackwell, 1996).

"the more people us[e] the GPS tracking, the more objective the map will be again."[22] Regarding the possible uses of ART's location data, too, it is clear that both the top-down and bottom-up perspectives coexisted from its very inception. In her proposal for ART, Polak referred to the potential top-down use of the collected data: "Specific professionals and individuals might benefit directly from this map. One could think of people who have a high degree of mobility: taxi drivers, cycle couriers, homeless people, repairmen, and grocery delivery services." She also referred to its bottom-up, subversive elements:

> A totally different approach might be to use this project to break down the power of cartography. For example, it is also possible to invite a group of people to use this drawing machine to make their own personalized maps: somebody could use the GPS device to write the name of his/her beloved by riding through specific streets [...]; yet another person could decide to make an irrelevant path look like an important transport axis.[23]

Again, the issue is that this latter is not a "totally different approach," as Polak phrased it, but it is part and parcel of locative technology. Subversion, "sousveillance" and surveillance go hand in hand in *all* locative projects.

Story Maps and Deep Maps

One way to do justice to this productive tension within locative projects is to emphasize the role of storytelling, textuality and intertextuality in mapping cities. Why? Mapping and storytelling are both ways to understand the world, and the two have always been closely connected. The advantage of studying storytelling and mapping in conjunction is that we become more aware of the processual nature of mapping and its temporal dimension, which, in turn, can keep such collective mapping projects more open-ended. As Doreen Massey famously put it, "loose ends and ongoing stories are real challenges to cartography."[24] Maps that foreground their connection to stories, whether through geolocation, geotagging or other methods, acknowledge the value of these "loose ends" not as a deficit or uncertainty but as a potentially

22 Esther Polak, "Journal for Insiders," 23 February 2002, https://www.polakvanbekkum.nl/assets/uploads/2013/05/JournalForInsiders01.pdf.

23 Ibid.

24 Doreen Massey, *For Space* (Sage, 2005), 107.

productive open space for interpretation. I am particularly interested in the challenges that life writing genres pose to cartography. Diaries, letters, social media posts and other types of autobiographical accounts present unique challenges but also unique opportunities to grapple with the complex question of how to map spaces by documenting lives and vice versa. In the following, I will focus on "story maps" and "deep maps" that foreground the role of personal stories in mapping cities.

In ART, storytelling was relegated to a secondary role. Although the website described ART as a "diary in traces" and the word "diary" suggests some form of textuality (even if it's visualized), organizers seemed somewhat puzzled by the narrative aspects of their own project and wondered about people's "fascination" with the way location data shaped their stories.[25] In contrast to ART, many collective mapping projects from the last decade prioritize storytelling, meaning they focus specifically on the way location data shapes our personal and collective narratives and vice versa. The last two decades saw a huge boom in "story mapping."[26] In *Story Revolutions: Collective Narratives from the Enlightenment to the Digital Age*, I reviewed this recent trend of mapping urban spaces through aggregated personal stories using examples from New York City.[27] I argued that collective story maps demonstrate beautifully the deep connection between embodied perception, spatial imagination and storytelling. First, similarly to ART, these story maps tend to emphasize the role of movement, experiential knowledge and physical embodiment. Some highlight the physical activities involved in mapping, others focus on the embodied, experiential knowledge resulting from sensory perception, or the affective dimensions of engaging with space. Second, collective story maps stress the role of imagination in "taming" spaces. They celebrate our capacity to imaginatively seize and reclaim spaces in the urban jungle. By inviting people to share stories about their favourite or memorable spots in the city, this emergent "cartography of intimate narratives" promises to "enliven" dead spaces through imagination.[28] Finally, by foregrounding the role of storytelling, these dynamic story maps draw on the rich semiotic tradition which defines urban spaces in terms of signifying practices. The advantage of this approach lies in

25 Dekker, "Traversing," 56.

26 The term "story map" has evolved over the last decade, and thanks to its commercialization and software such as ArcGIS it has become mainstream. I use it here in the specific sense of mapping cities by mapping citizens' personal stories.

27 Helga Lenart-Cheng, *Story Revolutions*: *Collective Narratives from the Enlightenment to the Digital Age* (University of Virginia Press, 2022).

28 Cooper and Gopnik, *Mapping Manhattan.*

its emphasis on the reciprocity of space "speaking to people" and people "speaking space." As Roland Barthes remarked: "The city is a discourse and this discourse is truly a language: the city speaks to its inhabitants, we speak our city, the city where we are, simply by living in it, by wandering through it, by looking at it."[29]

As story mapping grew and GIS technologies became ubiquitous, humanities scholars called for theories and methods that would do justice to the complexity of story maps, including the interconnectedness of the spatial and the temporal, the subjective and the objective elements of mapping. As David J. Bodenhamer wrote in *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*: "In the context of the humanities, it will be necessary to replace th[e] more limited quantitative representation of space with a view that emphasizes the intangible and socially constructed world and not simply the world that can be measured."[30] In response, scholars developed the concepts of "deep mapping" and "thick mapping."[31] In Bodenhamer's definition,

> A deep map is a finely detailed, multimedia depiction of a place and the people, animals, and objects that exist within it and are thus inseparable from the contours and rhythms of everyday life. Deep maps are not confined to the tangible or material, but include the discursive and ideological dimensions of place, the dreams, hopes, and fears of residents—they are, in short, positioned between matter and meaning.[32]

To put it in more practical terms, deep maps "can link places to documents about their history. They can help support subjective descriptions, and narratives and as a storytelling approach they can help make complex and large-scale technical information legible and meaningful for local communities."[33]

Researchers in Amsterdam are now also experimenting with deep maps that link places to personal stories. The research collective Amsterdam

29 Roland Barthes, "Semiology and the Urban," in *The City and the Sign* (Columbia University Press, 1986).

30 David J. Bodenhamer, John Corrigan and Trevor M. Harris, eds, *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives* (Indiana University Press, 2015), 10.

31 Ibid. See also Bloom's definition in Brett Bloom, "Deep Maps," in *This Is Not an Atlas*, https://notanatlas.org/maps/deep-maps/. See also the concept of "thick mapping" in digital humanities and related projects in Todd Presner, David Shepard and Yoh Kawano, *HyperCities: Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities* (Harvard University Press, 2014).

32 Bodenhamer et al., *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*, 3.

33 "Deep Map," *Wikipedia*, 23 March 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Deep_map&oldid=1215237508.

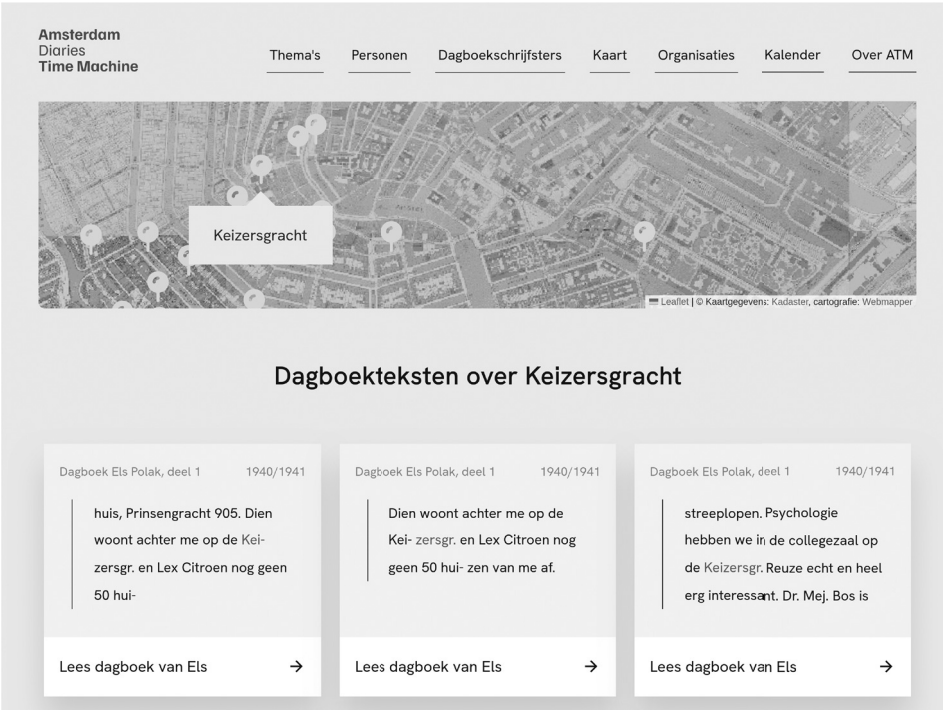

Fig. 12.2. Screenshot of the Amsterdam (June 2025) Diaries Time Machine showing a map of Amsterdam, with references to the Keizersgracht in the diary of Els Polak.

Time Machine has several related projects. For example, the projects "Deep Mapping Artists' Location" or "Navigating Jewish Amsterdam's Past with Open Linked Data" both draw on archival material "to enable storytelling about people, houses and events."[34] The project "Amsterdam Diaries Time Machine" works specifically with diaries as it "aims to collect, study, and present personal stories on the city of Amsterdam throughout the centuries to a broad audience." The data version presented six diaries of women living in Amsterdam during World War II. Organizers

> transcribed the diaries by using Transkribus, a tool for handwritten text recognition. Additionally, text snippets were selected in each diary to mark persons, places, organizations and dates. As Linked Data these marked entities were connected to external data sets as Wikidata (persons) and Adamlink (locations), thus making it possible to connect

34 Amsterdam Time Machine, "Projects," https://www.amsterdamtimemachine.nl/category/projects/.

> the readers of the diaries directly to the original sources on the level of sentences. As an example of how to visualise and connect the different diaries online, one general theme that often occurs in all diaries, has been made visible.[35]

The current iteration of the map marks locations mentioned by diary writers, hyperlinked to the diaries themselves. One of the greatest values of the project lies in organizers' detailed documentation of the methodological challenges they encounter in the process.

Challenges for Future Deep Maps

Examining ART's 2002 "diary in traces" side by side with these 2024 "deep maps of diaries" is a useful exercise because it highlights their respective strengths and challenges. First, it helps confront the illusion of transparency created by ART's "live" mapping exercise. ART used "live" location data from participants' movements which downplayed the distance created by temporality. The sense of simultaneity in ART, i.e. the idea that participants created the map *at the same time as* they were moving, has the advantage of foregrounding the active role of map makers in shaping space (see the emphasis on "real" time in the title). As Polak rightly noted: "instead of thinking of landscape as a given that you as a mobile entity decide to move through, I prefer to think of it as something that you produce by moving."[36] Indeed, space, like time, is never a neutral background "in front of which" things play out, but space is socially, materially and ideologically constructed as we go about our daily routines. As noted earlier, ART drew on earlier mapping trends that accentuated the embodied experience of the map maker and the spatially and temporally located, singular moment when the map was being formed. The advantage of this phenomenological approach is that it valorizes the personal, "lived in" quality of space and the sociopolitical potential of reimagining spaces through personal perspectives. However, the same idea of immediacy and simultaneity can also lead to the problematic illusion of transparency, suggesting that the map "construct[ed] itself." As the Waag website puts it: "From these lines a (partial) map of Amsterdam constructed itself."[37] This description of the process accentuates the lived

35 Ibid.
36 Mueller, "Interview with Esther Polak."
37 Waag Futurelab, "Amsterdam RealTime."

experience of the map maker, but in doing so it creates a false sense of neutrality, as if there was more objectivity and truth in movements that were being recorded "in the moment."

By contrast, Amsterdam Diaries Time Machine's deep maps use past location data recorded in historical diaries, which automatically highlights the historical distance and gap and the resulting need for interpretation. The advantage of such deep maps is that they acknowledge the value of the distance created by both time and textuality. Instead of promoting the immediacy of lived experience, such story maps can explore the rich layers of interpretation co-created by many different agents over time, including diarists, map makers, and map users. To quote Bodenhamer et al.:

> What is added by these deep maps is a reflexivity that acknowledges how engaged human agents build spatially framed identities and aspirations out of imagination and memory and how the multiple perspectives constitute a spatial narrative that complements the prose narrative traditionally employed by humanists.[38]

In other words, such deep maps acknowledge that space has not just been lived in, but it has also already been interpreted by people. Less interested in objectivity than in reflexivity, deep maps aim to provoke open-ended negotiations about the meaning of spaces. "Framed as a conversation and not a statement, they are inherently unstable, continually unfolding and changing in response to new data, new perspectives, and new insights."[39]

Of course, deep maps using autobiographical narratives as source material are not immune to the dangers of positivism either. The challenge here lies in the temptation to treat diaries as more authentic and therefore factually more reliable sources of information. They can also fall prey to a territorialism driven by the desire to do justice to certain neglected voices. Personal narratives have indeed a unique role in resisting the standardization inherent in mapping, which is why they are often celebrated as "making room" for marginalized places and voices. The Amsterdam Diaries Time Machine authors, for example, focus specifically on diaries of women in WW II which puts these women and their networks onto the city map. Their gesture of recovery is symbolized by the pink balloons planted onto the map. The advantage of this approach is that it can create sites of resistance that have the positive potential to produce more inclusive narratives about city spaces.

38 Bodenhamer et al., *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*, 3–4.

39 Ibid., 27.

Meanwhile, too much emphasis on restitution can be a potential drawback in that it can reduce the rich medium of stories to their denotative function. Traditional, fixed-point, plain-view maps where each individual's story is represented by a symbol on the map have the unfortunate effect of limiting the transgressive potential of stories. It is of course impossible to ever accommodate all the connotations that people assign to what is denoted on a map, and current mapping technologies do not allow for truly dynamic story maps. Still, as we develop new story maps we should strive to maintain the open-ended dynamics of stories and their many, conflicting and often unfulfilled potentials. This requires that we read diaries as testimonies of possibilities rather than facts, and that we respect their power to not just claim spaces but also to transgress them.

In conclusion, ART's phenomenological concern with the process of map making and the Amsterdam Diaries Time Machine's hermeneutic concern with the (inter)textuality of deep maps supplement each other beautifully. The former emphasizes the importance of the situatedness of each individual mapmaker and the immediacy that comes from this specificity, while the latter stresses the distance created by the mapping process and textuality and the need for interpretation that arises from this distance.[40] These phenomenological and hermeneutic perspectives are not merely supplementary but are codependent on each other to produce their effects. While the intertextual layers add depth to each map, their successful function depends on each user's subjective and located actualization of those references. And as long as they are attentive to their own conflicting epistemologies, together they can support the political mission of using maps to create more inclusive spaces.

Bibliography

Sources

Amsterdam Time Machine. "Projects." https://www.amsterdamtimemachine.nl/category/projects/.

40 David Cooper and Gary Priestnall proposed a similar hybrid concept called "processual intertextuality" to bring these two positions closer to each other. See David Cooper and Gary Priestnall, "The Processual Intertextuality of Literary Cartographies: Critical and Digital Practices," *Cartographic Journal* 48, no. 4 (2011): 250–62. For a sophisticated discussion of "humanistic approaches to display," see Johanna Drucker, *Visualization and Interpretation: Humanistic Approaches to Display* (MIT Press, 2020).

D'Ignazio, Catherine. "It Takes 154,000 Breaths to Evacuate Boston." *Kanarinka*, 1 November 2009. http://www.kanarinka.com/project/it-takes–154000-breaths-to-evacuate-boston/.

HyperCities. https://www.hypercities.com/.

Oliver, Julian. "Border Bumping." 1 March 2012. https://julianoliver.com/projects/border-bumping/.

polakvanbekkum. "AmsterdamREALTIME—Polakvanbekkum." 2 May 2002. https://www.polakvanbekkum.com/works/amsterdamrealtime/.

Waag. "Amsterdam Diaries Time Machine." https://diaries.amsterdamtimemachine.nl/about.

Waag. "Amsterdam RealTime—Dagboek in Sporen," http://realtime.waag.org/en_index.html.

Waag Futurelab. "Amsterdam RealTime." https://waag.org/en/project/amsterdam-realtime.

Waag Futurelab. "Amsterdam RealTime at 'Made in Amsterdam.'" 8 March 2016. https://waag.org/en/article/amsterdam-realtime-made-amsterdam.

Waag Futurelab. "What Is Waag?" https://waag.org/en/about-waag.

Literature

Barthes, Roland. "Semiology and the Urban." In *The City and the Sign*. Columbia University Press, 1986.

Bloom, Brett. "Deep Maps." In *This Is Not an Atlas*. https://notanatlas.org/maps/deep-maps/.

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

Brantner, Cornelia. "New Visualities of Space and Place: Mapping Theories, Concepts and Methodology of Visual Communication Research on Locative Media and Geomedia." *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 13, no. 2 (2018). https://doi.org/10.16997/wpcc.290.

Cooper, Becky, and Adam Gopnik. *Mapping Manhattan: A Love* (*and Sometimes Hate*) *Story in Maps by 75 New Yorkers*. Abrams, 2013. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/stmarysca-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4012621.

Cooper, David, and Gary Priestnall. "The Processual Intertextuality of Literary Cartographies: Critical and Digital Practices." *Cartographic Journal* 48, no. 4 (2011): 250–62. https://doi.org/10.1179/1743277411Y.0000000025.

Dean, Jodi. *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive*. Polity, 2010.

De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. University of California Press, 1984.

"Deep Map." *Wikipedia*, 23 March 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Deep_map&oldid=1215237508.

Dekker, Annet. "Traversing the Route: From MediaMarkt to Cameroon" [interview with Esther Polak]. In *Navigating e-Culture*, edited by Cathy Brickwood and Annet Dekker, 53–64. Virtueel Platform, 2009. https://catalogus.boekman.nl/pub/P09-133-7.pdf.

Drucker, Johanna. *Visualization and Interpretation: Humanistic Approaches to Display*. MIT Press, 2020.

Fahy, Claire. "Runners and Cyclists Use GPS Mapping to Make Art." *New York Times*, 24 September 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/24/technology/gps-art-strava-running.html.

Fusco, Coco. "Questioning the Frame. Thoughts about Maps and Spatial Logic in the Global Present." *In These Times*, 16 December 2004. https://inthesetimes.com/article/questioning-the-frame.

"GPS Maps 2008." http://www.gpsdrawing.com/maps.html.

Jenkins, Henry, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green. *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. NYU Press, 2013.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Blackwell, 1991.

Lenart-Cheng, Helga. *Story Revolutions: Collective Narratives from the Enlightenment to the Digital Age*. University of Virginia Press, 2022.

Lynch, Kevin. *The Image of the City*. MIT Press, 1960.

Massey, Doreen. *For Space*. Sage, 2005.

Milgram, Stanley, Judith Greenwald, Suzanne Kessler, Wendy McKenna and Judith Waters. "A Psychological Map of New York City: Cities Possess Psychological Dimensions That Can Be Mapped through New Cartographic Techniques." *American Scientist* 60, no. 2 (1972): 194–200.

Mueller, Ellen. "Interview with Esther Polak." 5 February 2024. https://ellenmueller.com/interview-with-esther-polak/.

Museum of Modern Art. "Stanley Brouwn. *Steps*, 1970." https://www.moma.org/collection/works/109539.

Polak, Esther. "Journal for Insiders." 23 February 2002. https://www.polakvanbekkum.nl/assets/uploads/2013/05/JournalForInsiders01.pdf.

Poletti, Anna, and Julie Rak, eds. *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2014.

Presner, Todd, David Shepard and Yoh Kawano. *HyperCities: Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities.* Harvard University Press, 2014.

Propen, Amy D. "Critical GPS: Toward a New Politics of Location." *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 4, no. 1 (2005): 131–44. https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v4i1.731.

Prutzer, Ned. "Examining Amsterdam RealTime: Blueprints, the Cartographic Imaginary and the Locative Uncanny." *InVisible Culture* 23 (2015). https://doi.org/10.47761/494a02f6.596ef017.

Schmidt, Christian Marc, and Liangjie Xia. "Invisible Cities: Representing Social Networks in an Urban Context." *Parsons Journal for Information Mapping* 3, no. 1 (2011). http://www.christianmarcschmidt.com/invisiblecities.

Segal, Zeg, and Bram Vannieuwenhuyze, eds. *Motion in Maps, Maps in Motion*: Mapping Stories and Movement through Time. Amsterdam University Press, 2020.

Soja, Edward W. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Blackwell, 1996.

"STACK—Share." https://polakvanbekkum.stackstorage.com/s/iNQVQLAMbsKUg5Hv/en.

Zuboff, Shoshana. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. Public Affairs, 2019.

About the Author

Helga Lenart-Cheng (PhD, Harvard University) is full professor at Saint Mary's College of California. Her research focuses on algorithmic storytelling, media studies, theories of narrative and memory, and phenomenological hermeneutics. Her recent book, *Story Revolutions* (2022), studies collective projects of storytelling.

13. Mapping Lives: The Amsterdam Diaries Time Machine

Leon van Wissen, Janna Aerts, Boudewijn Koopmans and Ingeborg Verheul

Abstract: This chapter explores how digital life narrative projects, like the *Amsterdam Diaries Time Machine*, can help illustrate the complexity of human experience within and across people's stories. This digital application brings together several diaries written by women in Amsterdam during World War II. Following annotation of references to people, organizations, dates, and places, and linking them through linked open data (LOD), the project enables the study of patterns within and across diaries. We examine how these datasets illustrate Amsterdam's role in these women's lives and daily wartime experiences. By combining urban history and life narrative studies, this interdisciplinary approach provides deeper insights into how historical Amsterdam was experienced and shaped by the women living in its urban spaces.

Keywords: digital humanities; life writing; World War II diaries; linked open data; women's urban experiences; historical annotation

Introduction

In this chapter, we present the work done in our Amsterdam Diaries pilot project, part of the Amsterdam Time Machine project, in which we explore the lived experiences of the city of Amsterdam through the use of diary entries, written by local inhabitants.[1] In recent decades, urban history has increasingly shifted its focus from the historical city itself to its inhabitants. Since the advent of bottom-up approaches and the growing attention in history from below for

1 Amsterdam Time Machine, https://www.amsterdamtimemachine.nl/.

Rensen, Marleen, Leonieke Vermeer, Laura van Hasselt and Ernestine Hoegen, eds. *Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity: Urban Lives*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2025.
DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-13

little known voices—such as those of women, children and migrants—researchers have become more interested in how ordinary people interacted with the city and how it shaped their everyday lives.[2] A similar trend is evident in diary studies, where leading figures like Philippe Lejeune have concentrated their research on unpublished diaries authored by individuals "on the margins."[3]

The diary genre, due to its inherently daily character, is inextricably linked to the theme of the everyday. Diaries often capture aspects of daily life that are dismissed as "banal" or "unimportant" in other autobiographical genres. This may explain why urban history has so far paid surprisingly little attention to diaries as a genre. Furthermore, even when urban historians utilize diaries as historical sources, the (individual) subjective experiences of city residents are frequently overlooked. Yet diaries represent an immensely valuable resource for examining this personal dimension, capturing otherwise fleeting information such as reflections and emotions related to the historical city. Additionally, because diaries are typically intimate texts, written shortly after the events they describe, they offer a less mediated account of citizens' urban experiences compared to other historical documents.[4]

The use of digital humanities or digital tools in urban diary studies remains even more uncommon. Digital approaches tend to focus primarily on contemporary case studies. For example, Alan Latham highlights the use of social media technologies as forms of virtual "micro-diaries" to analyse "the rhythms and variations in mood across the day, week, or even year."[5] Other research projects have employed GPS technologies as proxies for traditional diaries, tracking individuals' activities within urban spaces.[6]

So far, the potential of using and building on top of data delivered by (other) digital humanities projects and resources has been underutilized. For instance, through digitization initiatives in libraries and archives, it

2 Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Penguin, 1970); Raphael Samuel, "History Workshop, 1966–80," in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (Routledge, 1981); Eric Hobsbawm, "History from Below: Some Reflections," in *History from Below: Studies in Popular Protest and Popular Ideology in Honour of George Rudé*, ed. Frederick Krantz (Concordia University, 1985), 63–73.

3 Philippe Lejeune, *Cher cahier…: Témoignages sur le journal personnel recueillis et présentés par Philippe Lejeune*, ed. Philippe Lejeune (Gallimard, 1989); Philippe Lejeune, *Le moi des demoiselles: Enquête sur le journal de jeune fille* (Seuil, 1993).

4 Françoise Simonet-Tenant, *Le journal intime: Genre littéraire et écriture ordinaire* (Téraèdre, 2004), 20; Irina Paperno, "What Can Be Done with Diaries?," in *The Russian Review* 63, no. 4 (2004): 565.

5 Alan Latham, "Using Diaries to Study Urban Worlds," in *Researching the City: A Guide for Students*, ed. Kevin Ward (Sage, 2014), 111.

6 E.g. J. Mackett, Y. Gong, K. Kitazawa and J. Paskins, "Setting Children Free: Children's Independent Movement in the Local Environment," CASA Working Paper Series (Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis, 2007).

nowadays is significantly easier to do archival research and contextualize research corpora. These archival records and supplementary digital resources provide valuable background information on subjects and situations described in urban diaries. What is more, the technique (i.e. linked open data) used to present and disseminate this data makes it possible to seamlessly connect the personal perspective of the diary author with the wider historical context. Our Diaries Time Machine pilot project is innovative in the sense that it merges the world of digital humanities with that of urban diary studies. It integrates the diaries into a web of interconnected heritage data, allowing us to bring the diaries closer to their relevant contexts.

Specifically, we focus on diaries written by women living in Amsterdam during the Second World War, which enables us to add an extra layer of personal reflection and representation of the city to existing urban historical research. We make use of digital methods and tools such as geographic information systems (GIS) and interlink the data extracted from these diaries with knowledge bases through linked open data (LOD). Through this method, we apply these ideas to a digital interactive map of Amsterdam diaries, which will assist research, making it easier to discern patterns and clusters of the "denser webs that document the complexity of the human experience" within and across people's stories.[7] However, this chapter only offers preliminary examples of what can be achieved by combining a corpus of urban diaries with interconnected data. It should be regarded as an initial exploration of its potential. While it highlights a selection of possible starting points for further in-depth research, it is by no means exhaustive. These diaries deserve a deeper investigation, and we hope that our infrastructure and contributions will serve as a foundation to support and facilitate the creation of such work.

The Amsterdam Time Machine

The Amsterdam Time Machine (ATM) aims to connect (heritage) data related to Amsterdam, making information about Amsterdam's people, locations, events and organizations more available to a wide audience of researchers, heritage professionals and citizen scientists. By linking the collections of multiple data providers (galleries, libraries, archives, museums and government entities) and making them uniformly searchable and enrichable within an open infrastructure, the Amsterdam Time Machine

7 Todd S. Presner, David Shepard and Yoh Kawano, *HyperCities: Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities* (Harvard University Press, 2014), 12–13.

and its partners create an opportunity to gain deeper insights into both the history and the future of the city.

A crucial component of the Amsterdam Time Machine is its location infrastructure, which serves as the backbone for connecting and analysing these heterogeneous collections.[8] For example, the Adamlink dataset provides access to historical data on Amsterdam's neighbourhoods, streets and addresses, including spelling variants, geometries and links to external sources such as the Dutch cadastre and Wikidata.[9] This data is published as linked open data, assigning unique identifiers to each geographical feature. As a result, others can link to this dataset and utilize its additional information, such as coordinates, by simply following these links (manually by browsing its website, or automatically through APIs). This approach not only enhances the relevance of any linked dataset or research output by integrating it into the broader network of interlinked data on Amsterdam but also saves researchers significant time. Much of the foundational information on these features is readily available and can be freely integrated, eliminating the need to manually geolocate places on a map, as this functionality is already embedded within the infrastructure.

The ATM mainly operates as a networking organization, contributing to connections between heritage providers, researchers and other local "time machines." By serving as a bridge between these parties, the ATM enhances collaboration and promotes the integration of diverse data sources. Beyond its role in facilitating these linkages, the ATM has also developed several proof-of-concept applications and public websites that demonstrate the advantages of interconnected data. These initiatives showcase the practical benefits of linking and enriching data, highlighting how such connections can unlock new insights and make cultural heritage more accessible to a broader audience. Through these efforts, the ATM not only proves the value of its infrastructure but also encourages further innovation and exploration in the field of digital heritage and digital humanities.

Amsterdam Diaries Time Machine

One of the public web applications of the Amsterdam Time Machine for the general public is the Amsterdam Diaries Time Machine, which was

8 Janna Aerts, Boudewijn Koopmans and Leon van Wissen, "Amsterdam Time Machine: Pilot Jewish History of Amsterdam," paper presented at DH Benelux 2023, Brussels, Belgium, 5 June 2023, https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8005670.

9 https://adamlink.nl/, resp. https://wikidata.org.

Fig. 13.1. Example of a single diary entry of author Margaretha van Hinte (who writes about —and through the eyes of— the Jewish baby she kept in hiding, Berdi Pront) on the Amsterdam Diaries Time Machine website (https://diaries.amsterdamtimemachine.nl). Shown is the transcribed text, including several annotations to locations (in green), persons (blue), and food (purple). ⏎

launched on 4 May 2024, National Remembrance Day, at the City Archives of Amsterdam. The project aims to make the diaries of ordinary people in Amsterdam more accessible while enhancing the infrastructure for connecting a wide range of personal histories using open web standards, such as linked open data and GIS. In the first phase of this pilot, we focused on the diaries of six women living in Amsterdam during the Second World War, offering a new dimension to the application of historical spatial information within the ATM infrastructure. It also serves as a tool for analysis and helps to contextualize locations for which little information is available, for example, by offering alternative labels and linking them to other entities (such as persons and organizations) mentioned in the diary fragments. A screenshot of one of the diary entries on the website is shown in figure 13.1.

Method

Corpus Selection

The corpus of diaries was selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- A digitized/scanned copy of the diary is available in a public archive or library, or through a central portal such as Het Geheugen (The Memory).[10]
- The diary's content deals not only with the writer's inner life but also describes the urban landscape of Amsterdam.
- We selected only diaries of women who lived in Amsterdam during World War II. War history often focuses on battles and soldiers, leaving women underrepresented. However, the war affected daily life, with many women active in the resistance and taking over men's jobs, such as conducting streetcars and trains or working as letter carriers. By focusing on diaries written by women during this period, we aim to counteract this bias in history writing.

The scans we used were provided by the Amsterdam City Archives, Atria Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History, the Jewish Museum and the Resistance Museum.[11] However, with the exception of the Amsterdam City Archives, these scans are not yet available in a format that allows us to work with them directly without first downloading and storing them ourselves. Until these archives implement the IIIF Image API, we must store

10 https://geheugen.delpher.nl/nl.

11 https://archief.amsterdam/; https://atria.nl/; https://jck.nl/; https://www.verzetsmuseum.org/.

and host the images ourselves to transcribe, annotate and display them on the project's website.[12] After downloading the scans, we loaded them into Transkribus, a tool for transcribing and annotating handwritten material.[13]

With the help of student assistants, we processed each diary as follows:[14]

- *Layout identification*: We identified and tagged the structural elements on each page, including visual elements like drawings or pasted newspaper snippets, paragraphs, marginalia, headings, and page numbers. Each paragraph was individually segmented to maintain the structure for later use in adding line breaks to the running text on the website.
- *Transcription*: The textual elements were transcribed using Transkribus HTR models and manually corrected.
- *Annotation*: We annotated and tagged textual elements such as blackening, strikethroughs, and italics, as well as persons, organizations, places and dates. We also tagged text fragments related to the theme of "food and drink."

Due to temporal constraints, we further restricted this process to diary entries mentioning at least one Amsterdam related entity.

Technique and Data

In the background, these data are converted into linked open data and made available in a format that can easily serve a website. Data gathered in Transkribus, such as handwriting and annotations, is exported in Transkribus's Page XML format and then processed into web annotations (cf. the Web Annotation Vocabulary) of varying granularity and purpose:[15]

- *Transcriptions*: The transcription itself is converted into web annotations at the line level, storing the transcribed text in relation to its coordinates on the page.
- *Regions and classifications*: The regions that contain these lines, along with their classifications (e.g. heading, paragraph or visual), are stored as separate web annotations. This captures the necessary information to

12 https://iiif.io/api/image/3.0/.

13 Kahle, Philip, Sebastian Colutto, Günter Hackl and Günter Mühlberger, "Transkribus: A Service Platform for Transcription, Recognition, and Retrieval of Historical Documents," In *2017 14th IAPR International Conference on Document Analysis and Recognition (ICDAR), Volume 4*, 19–24 (IEEE, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1109/ICDAR.2017.307.

14 We thank Berber van der Kaaij, Lucie Ufheil and Lianne Wilhelmus for their transcriptions and annotations.

15 https://www.w3.org/TR/annotation-vocab/.

reconstruct the diary entries and maintain the structure of each entry, including the classification in relation to the coordinates on the page.
- *Entity and concept annotations*: Annotations related to persons, places, organizations, dates and food-related concepts are stored as textual annotations. These link the classification of the annotation to the text from the first level of transcriptions by character offset. Separate from this, metadata for individual diary entries and the diary as a whole is stored in a spreadsheet and is also converted to linked open data (cf. schema.org vocabulary).[16]
- *Diary entry boundaries*: Additional web annotations are created to indicate where a diary entry starts and ends. These annotations provide metadata on the entry's title and date (when available) and specify the regions it spans. The entry is stored as its own resource and is linked to the diary to which it belongs.
- *Diary metadata*: Metadata about the diary itself and the collection it belongs to is stored as a separate object. This primarily mirrors information found in the archive's or library's catalogue.

As a final step, the tagged entities (i.e. persons, places, organizations) are identified and linked to their corresponding representations in existing online datasets. This was done manually in a spreadsheet and with the help of OpenRefine:[17]

- *Entity linking*: People and organizations are linked to Wikidata or to the Amsterdam City Archives, while place entities, such as neighbourhoods, streets, and addresses, are linked to Adamlink. This information is stored in the entity annotations.
- *Reintegration of data*: Additionally, information from the external knowledge bases such as standardized labels, short descriptions and coordinates (if available), is reintegrated into the diaries' dataset. This enriched data can then be used on both overview and detail pages of the website.

The data structure described above serves two primary purposes. First, it provides a standardized technical representation for storing structured data, enabling its use on websites or other digital platforms. Second, by independently modelling the data extraction and enrichment pipeline

16 https://schema.org/.
17 https://openrefine.org/.

while maintaining the connection between the identified elements and their corresponding coordinates on the manuscript pages, we hope that our work becomes more transparent and easier for users to verify. This way, our (digital) interpretation remains closely connected to the original author's work. The feature on the diaries website that allows for inspecting the original diary fragments builds on top of this provenance trail. All data and the scripts used in its extraction and conversion are openly available and can be downloaded and reused from the data dump on Zenodo.[18]

Case Study

With the collected and interlinked data, we can use GIS to create visualizations of the selected Amsterdam diaries. This approach is a first step toward making it easier to identify patterns and clusters within and across individual stories, ideally clarifying the role certain places play in the lives of the diary authors, as well as visually depicting how the city figures into people's lives and the role urban spaces play in their daily experiences.

To achieve this, we make use of the extra information that we obtained by linking the annotated place and organization entities (both of which have relatively fixed location information) to external datasets such as Wikidata and the Amsterdam Time Machine. Rather than manually geolocating these places, we make use of the existing geometries, geocoordinates, place types, standardized labels and available descriptions within these knowledge graphs.

It is important to note, however, that the current corpus is relatively small, and that any case study presented here is still in the early stages of development, with limited statistical significance. For example, a straightforward descriptive analysis involves plotting all the annotated and identified place data on a map of Amsterdam, distinguishing between different diary authors. Additionally, we can plot the known home addresses of the authors on the same map, allowing for an analysis of the spatial reach of each author. While these initial studies offer valuable insights, they are primarily exploratory and will benefit from further data expansion and refinement.

The result of such a virtualization can be seen in figure 13.2 and shows coloured points scattered over a present-day map of Amsterdam. The colour indicates the author mentioning a particular location of which we

18 Leon van Wissen, Janna Aerts, Boudewijn Koopmans, Ingeborg Verheul, Marleen Rensen and Amsterdam Time Machine, *Amsterdam Diaries Time Machine—Data (v1.0)* [dataset] (Zenodo, 2024), https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14385058.

normalized its geometry to a single point (latitude, longitude). The size of the point is determined by how often the location is mentioned by the author. To prevent overlapping and therefore illegible points, each point has been plotted with a small offset to its real location. The map is generated with Folium and is interactive once loaded in a web browser, allowing further inspection of how a particular location is mentioned in the author's diaries.[19]

Analysis

Looking at the annotation frequency statistics in table 13.1 and the map in figure 13.2, we can see that Margaretha van Hinte's diary references the most locations. Her diary also covers the largest spatial extent, both within and outside of Amsterdam. Not only does she mention the largest number of places, nearly half of these are located within Amsterdam. The locations she mentions are situated mainly near her residence in the south of Amsterdam and the city centre.

In the following excerpt from Van Hinte's diary, she describes hearing about a shooting in the city, specifically at Ferdinand Bolstraat, as relayed to her by someone working in the factories in the Omval neighbourhood. These locations serve as a way to convey the events happening in Amsterdam and to provide context about the backgrounds and professions of those involved. Notably, the factories she mentions no longer exist, highlighting the transformation of Amsterdam over time for a present-day reader.

> *De Telegraaf* is geweest. Een van de loopsters (bezorgsters) vertelde dat er op de Ferdinand Bolstraat een vrouw werd gewond door het mitrailleurvuur. Twee paarden voor een lijkkoets zijn losgebroken. Er was paniek. Cor heeft iemand gesproken die werkzaam was aan een van de fabrieken aan de Omval. Zij moesten allemaal plat op de grond gaan liggen en hebben in doodsangst verkeerd.
>
> —17 mei 1943, Margaretha van Hinte (original)

> *The Telegraaf* has been here. One of the newspaper girls reported that a woman was injured by machine-gun fire on Ferdinand Bolstraat. Two horses pulling a hearse bolted. There was panic. Cor spoke to someone who worked at one of the factories on the Omval. They all had to lie flat on the ground and were terrified.
>
> —17 May 1943, Margaretha van Hinte (translation)

19 https://python-visualization.github.io/folium/latest/.

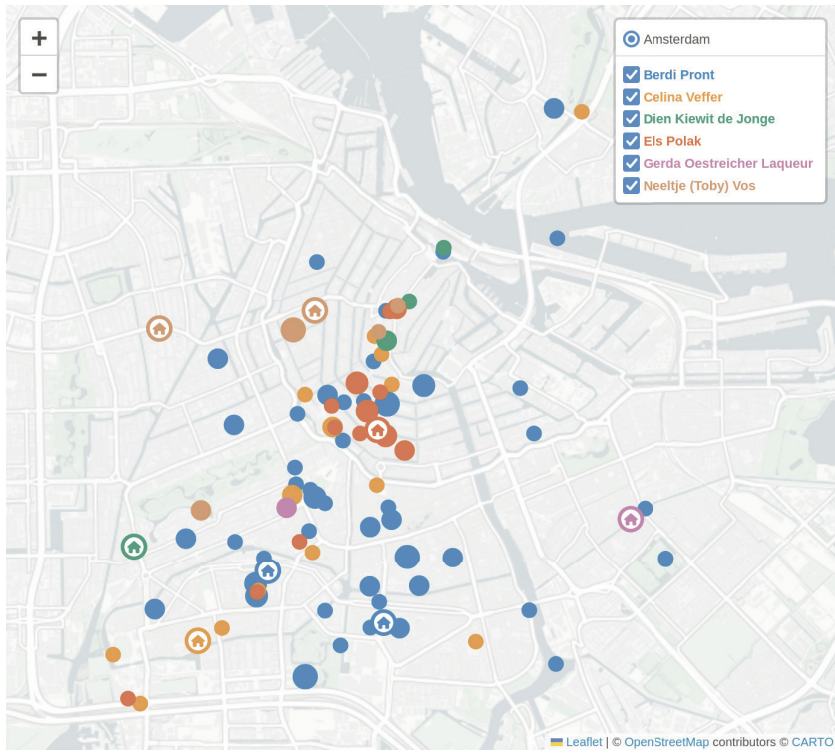

Fig. 13.2. Overview of annotated places that are linked to external knowledge bases, coloured by author. The size of the circle is determined by the frequency of each place. Additionally, if known, the residential locations in this entire time period of the authors are plotted.

Table 13.1. Number of linked place annotations (non-unique) per author, with a separate column for linked annotations to places in Amsterdam (filtered by bounding box).

Author	Linked Place Annotations	Amsterdam only
Margaretha van Hinte	149	77
Celina Veffer	21	16
Dien Kiewit de Jonge	98	5
Els Polak	65	21
Gerda Oestreicher- Laqueur	37	2
Neeltje (Toby) Vos	19	8

This is different for Els Polak, whose mentioned locations are almost all in the proximity of her residency in the centre of Amsterdam. Polak mentions specific locations by their street and address, such as Leidsestraat 95 (the location of the Kempinski hotel and restaurant), Prinsengracht 905 (her

own address) and Prinsengracht 1015 (a place with student housing where the author visits and wants to live), as illustrated in two fragments:

> M'n plan is om in een huis te gaan waar andere meisjes en jongens studenten op kamers wonen. Bijv. Pr. Gr. 1015. Ik ga er gauw eens een kijkje nemen.
>
> —6 maart 1941, Els Polak (original)

> My plan is to move into a house where other boys and girls, who are students, live in rooms. For example, Prinsengracht 1015. I'm going to check it out soon.
>
> —6 March 1941, Els Polak (translation)

> Zonet was ik op Prinsengr. 1015. Denderend. Ik had een meisje (vriendin van cursist 1e Jaars) opgebeld om haar kamer eens te mogen zien. Ze had een denderende kamer onder het dak. centr. verw. enstr. water f.52,50. p.m. Er zijn ±28 jongens en meisjes in huis. In minder dan geen tijd zaten we met z'n 4en. Heel geschikte jongens. Meest studenten. Goed eten etc. Ik hoop dat dit doorgaat.
>
> —19 maart 1941, Els Polak (original)

> I was just at Prinsengracht 1015. Fantastic! I'd called a girl (a friend of a first-year student) to see her room. She had an amazing attic room. Central heating, electricity, and water cost f. 52.50 per month. There are about twenty-eight boys and girls in the house. Before you knew it, there were four of us. Really nice guys. Mostly students. Good food, etc. I hope this works out.
>
> —19 March 1941, Els Polak (translation)

These two fragments tell us more about the social and economic conditions of the time, providing a glimpse into daily life, the housing situation and the interiors of homes during that period. Similarly, such a glimpse is also given by examining linked resources to these identified locations. For instance, the mentioning of the Kempinski restaurant is linked, in the data of the Amsterdam Time Machine, through its address, to visual material from the Amsterdam City Archive's Image Bank, such as a photo of the restaurant's interior. Such visual material shows the added value of connecting several data sources via a joint unique identifier, in this case the identifier of the location infrastructure of the Amsterdam Time Machine. We use the unique identifiers of (historical) addresses to enrich the description of a place in

the diary fragments with information from other datasets, even when a writer only gives very brief information (e.g. only an address). The same is true for written archival sources, such as the *woningkaarten* (housing cards) of Amsterdam that are also kept in the Amsterdam City Archives.

The smallest number of locations is mentioned in the diary of Dien Kiewit de Jonge and Gerda Oestreicher-Laqueur. The only location from Oestreicher-Laqueur's diary that we have been able to link to is a mention of the Concertgebouw, a renowned classical concert hall in Amsterdam, as can also be seen in the fact that this place is mentioned by two other authors as well. Below are excerpts given by all three authors:

> Alle bemühen sich weiter um gute Beziehungen und wenn irgendwo in Azien 5 Leute erschossen werden dann stellen sich die Länder auf die Hinterbeine. Tiere dürfen nicht gequält und gejagt werden die Juden wohl. Im Konzertgebouw die Menschen, die ich sprach, hatten den bekümmerten Ausdruck wie wir ihn in Karlsbad hatten nach Oestreichs Fall, "aufgeschreckt!"
>
> —15 November 1938, Gerda Oestreicher-Laqueur (original)

> Everyone continues to strive for good relations, and if five people are shot somewhere in Asia, countries stand on their hind legs. Animals must not be tortured and hunted, but Jews can be. At the Concertgebouw, the people I spoke to had the troubled expression we had in Karlsbad after the fall of Austria, "startled!"
>
> —15 November 1938, Gerda Oestreicher-Laqueur (translation)

> De volgende avond zijn we met Wally en Wim naar een concert in het concertgeb. geweest. O.l. van Ed. V. Beinum. Willem Mengelberg is gelukkig weg die N.S.B.er. Er ging voor van Beinum een denderend applaus op. Na afloop zijn we met z'n 4en naar de Pr. Gr. gegaan.
>
> —25 November 1940, Els Polak (original)

> The following evening, we went with Wally and Wim to a concert at the Concertgebouw, conducted by Ed. V. Beinum. Thankfully, Willem Mengelberg, that NSB member, was gone. There was thunderous applause for Van Beinum. Afterwards, the four of us went to the Pr. Gr.
>
> —25 November 1940, Els Polak (translation)

> Jantje, Max en ik zijn naar Boyd Boekema gegaan, die in het Concertgebouw speelde. Max is eerst zijn meisje gaan halen. Toen Jantje en ik

> bij het Concertgebouw aankwamen was daar een geweldige drukte, het was nog niet open. "Hoe komt dat?" Vroegen we natuurlijk. "Er zijn leden van het orkest weggebracht door de Grün Polizei," was het antwoord. We zijn nog een kwartiertje gebleven en hoorden toen dat de voorstelling uitgesteld was tot de volgende Zondag.
>
> —9 april 1944, Celina Veffer (original)

> Jantje, Max and I went to see Boyd Boekema, who was playing at the Concertgebouw. Max went to pick up his girlfriend first. When Jantje and I arrived at the Concertgebouw, there was a lot of commotion, and it wasn't open yet. "What's going on?," we naturally asked. "Members of the orchestra have been taken away by the Order Police," was the reply. We stayed for another quarter of an hour and then heard that the performance had been postponed until the following Sunday.
>
> —9 April 1944, Celina Veffer (translation)

In all three excerpts, the Concertgebouw is mentioned in connection with significant Nazi era events, both on a continental scale, as seen in Laqueur's account before the war in the Netherlands, and within Amsterdam itself. Together, these fragments provide a window into how a single location, the Concertgebouw, became intertwined with personal and collective memory. They underscore the dual function that public buildings can fulfil, illustrating how the Concertgebouw in particular served not only as a venue for entertainment but also as a space for social interaction and information exchange.

Another result of plotting these locations on the map of Amsterdam is that we can easily visualize the movement of the diary authors throughout the city. An example is this fragment of Celina Veffer, where she writes about going to the city centre after her lunch.

> Na gegeten te hebben, ben ik maar naar de stad gegaan. […] Natuurlijk was er weer luchtalarm, net toen ik in de Kalverstraat liep. Veffer [Jantje] was ik op de Munt tegengekomen en hij kwam me met het luchtalarm vlug weer achterna. […] Ook Flippie Hovius kwam ik tegen. Op het Rokin. Hij was aan het proberen of hij een kaart van Limburg kon kopen voor zijn broer, die in de mijnen gaat werken. Wij zijn samen naar Wille [voor een thermofles] en naar de tram gegaan. […] Met Flip ben ik even meegegaan naar de boekhandel op de Stadionweg, onder de de luifel kan hij een kaart kopen. We zijn samen ook weer naar de apotheek geweest, om mijn staaldrank te halen. Thuis zag ik dat de fles in mijn tas half leeggelopen was.
>
> —13 April 1944, Celina Veffer (original)

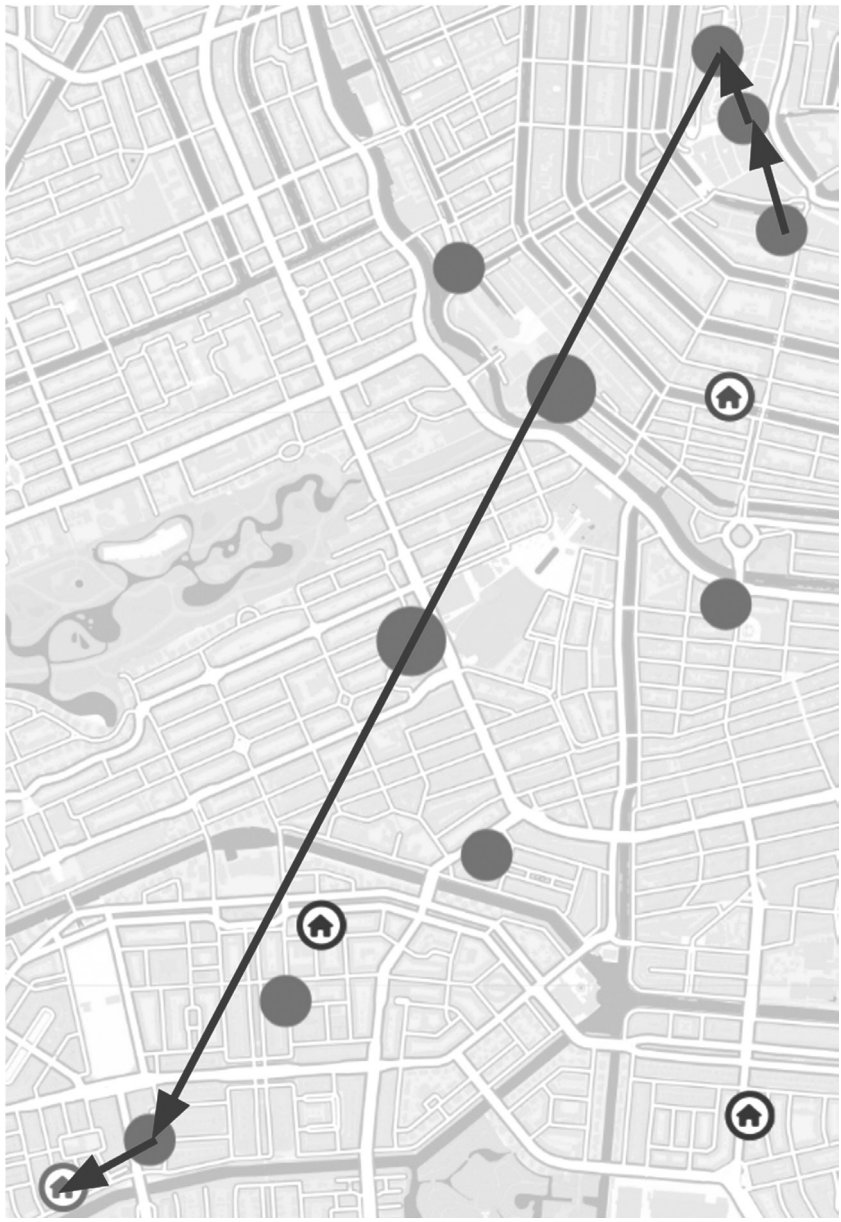

Fig. 13.3. Locations mentioned in the diary of Celina Veffer. The arrows visualize the route she takes as described in a single diary fragment on 13 April 1944. ⏎

After my lunch, I went to the centre. [...] Of course, there was another air raid siren, just as I was walking on Kalverstraat. I had met Veffer [Jantje] on the Munt and he quickly followed me with the siren. [...] I also met Flippie Hovius. On Rokin. He was trying to buy a map of Limburg for his

> brother, who is going to work in the mines. We went to Wille together [for a thermos] and to the tram. […] I went with Flip to the bookshop on Stadionweg, where he was able to buy a map. We also went to the pharmacist together, to get my medicine. At home I saw that the bottle had spilled in my bag and was half empty.
>
> —13 April 1944, Celina Veffer (translation)

Veffer references several locations in her diary, some of which are specific and easily identifiable, while others remain unclear—for instance, "Wille," likely a shop where she purchases a thermos, and a pharmacy. However, the visualization in figure 13.3 provides valuable insights: it clarifies that the shop is situated somewhere in the city centre, as she visits it before boarding the tram home, whereas the pharmacy appears to be closer to her residence. Visualizing this data in sequence therefore helps to pinpoint previously unidentified locations, resulting in a more complete understanding of the diary fragment and its historical context.

Reflection and Conclusion

This study demonstrates the potential of combining digital tools like GIS with diary research to create a digital, interactive map of Amsterdam life narratives. By collecting, digitizing and transcribing historical egodocuments, and annotating references to people, organizations, dates and places, we have been able to link these narratives to the (geo-)infrastructure of the Amsterdam Time Machine through linked open data. The use of GIS has allowed us to give an initial visualization of these narratives on a spatial aspect, an entry point into identifying patterns and clusters of intersecting life stories within and across the material of individual diarists. This way of presenting the data highlights how the city played a role in people's lives and how urban spaces influenced their daily experiences.

Moreover, the integration of personal narratives with potential existing statistical (e.g. census data), social economical (e.g. data on migration) and cultural data (e.g. archival documents) on historical Amsterdam could facilitate additional possibilities for research into individual experiences and broader historical contexts. By incorporating life narratives into the Time Machine's infrastructure, we not only enrich our own research but also contribute to a larger network of interconnected studies and (digital) heritage within the same geographical area. This approach offers a sustainable framework for preserving and reusing research data and ensuring that it remains accessible for future interdisciplinary research.

With this explorative pilot project, we aim to open up potential routes for more advanced research in the future, allowing for the exploration of complex urban patterns, the incorporation of additional contextual data and the possibility of cross-referencing with other linked datasets. We have demonstrated that the use of these external datasets can provide a preliminary exploration for ongoing and future interdisciplinary studies, enabling researchers to uncover new insights into the urban environment and its historical development. However, the limitations of this approach must be acknowledged. The researcher remains essential, as the process of annotation, interpretation and curation still requires considerable effort. Rather than replacing traditional methods, this approach should be seen as a tool to support and enhance them, offering opportunities to accelerate research and explore new research scopes.

Future steps in the Amsterdam Diaries project will include developing a thesaurus to describe the concepts mentioned in the diaries, which will provide additional methods for interlinking data with other collections and add even more structure to the dataset.

Acknowledgements

The Amsterdam Diaries Time Machine website was built by Total Design. The project has been made possible by donations of the Dutch Digital Heritage Network and the Mondriaan Fund.

About the Amsterdam Diaries Project

Amsterdam Diaries is a collaborative project of the University of Amsterdam and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam that collects and studies diaries and other egodocuments of Amsterdam residents to arrive at a better understanding of life in the city over the centuries. The aim of this project is to contribute to the long history of Amsterdam as a multicultural city by researching personal stories of city residents from different backgrounds.

Bibliography

Aerts, Janna, Boudewijn Koopmans and Leon van Wissen. "Amsterdam Time Machine: Pilot Jewish History of Amsterdam." Paper presented at DH Benelux 2023, Brussels, Belgium, 5 June 2023. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8005670.

Hobsbawm, Eric. "History from Below: Some Reflections." In *History from Below: Studies in Popular Protest and Popular Ideology in Honour of George Rudé*, edited by Frederick Krantz, 63–73. Concordia University Press, 1985.

Kahle, Philip, Sebastian Colutto, Günter Hackl and Günter Mühlberger. "Transkribus: A Service Platform for Transcription, Recognition, and Retrieval of Historical Documents." In *2017 14th IAPR International Conference on Document Analysis and Recognition* (*ICDAR*), Volume 4, 19–24. IEEE, 2017. https://doi.org/10.1109/ICDAR.2017.307.

Latham, Alan. "Using Diaries to Study Urban Worlds." In *Researching the City: A Guide for Students*, edited by Kevin Ward, 99–115. Sage, 2014.

Lejeune, Philippe. *Le moi des demoiselles: Enquête sur le journal de jeune fille.* Seuil, 1993.

Lejeune, Philippe, ed. *Cher cahier…: Témoignages sur le journal personnel recueillis et présentés par Philippe Lejeune.* Gallimard, 1989.

Mackett, J., Y. Gong, K. Kitazawa and J. Paskins. "Setting Children Free: Children's Independent Movement in the Local Environment." CASA Working Paper Series. Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis, 2007.

Paperno, Irina. "What Can Be Done with Diaries?" *The Russian Review* 63, no. 4 (2004): 561–73.

Presner, T. S., D. Shepard and Y. Kawano. *HyperCities: Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities.* Harvard University Press, 2014.

Pooley, Colin. "Travelling through the City: Using Life Writing to Explore Individual Experiences of Urban Travel c. 1840–1940." *Mobilities* 12, no. 4 (2017): 598–609. https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2017.1331019.

Pooley, Colin, and Marilyn Pooley. *Everyday Mobilities in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Diaries.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.

Samuel, Raphael. "History Workshop, 1966–80." In *People's History and Socialist Theory*, edited by Raphael Samuel, 410–17. Routledge, 1981.

Simonet-Tenant, Françoise. *Le journal intime: Genre littéraire et écriture ordinaire.* Téraèdre, 2004.

Thompson, Edward P. *The Making of the English Working Class.* Penguin, 1970. Originally published 1963.

Van Wissen, Leon, Janna Aerts, Boudewijn Koopmans and Ingeborg Verheul. "Amsterdam Diaries Time Machine: Connecting with LOD." *CIDOC 2024 International Conference* (*CIDOC 2024*). Zenodo, 2024. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14132278.

Van Wissen, Leon, Janna Aerts, Boudewijn Koopmans, Ingeborg Verheul, Marleen Rensen and Amsterdam Time Machine. *Amsterdam Diaries Time Machine—Data* (*v1.0*) [dataset]. Zenodo, 2024. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14385058.

About the Authors

Leon van Wissen (University of Amsterdam) has a background in Dutch literature and computational linguistics and works as a data engineer at UvA Data Science Centre, modelling linked open data and advancing research infrastructures like the GLOBALISE project and Amsterdam Time Machine.

Janna Aerts, a former Amsterdam Time Machine postdoc (2022–24), works at Archiefpunt Belgium on safeguarding war diaries. She co-published August Vermeylen's war diaries and researched Brussels' war diaries by literary authors (https://doi.org/10.3406/rbph.2020.9434).

Boudewijn Koopmans (University of Amsterdam) holds an MA in art and culture from the Open University. Following fifteen years at museums, including the Mauritshuis, he has worked as an impact developer at UvA since 2022. Koopmans deals with impactful collaborations between the university and societal partners.

Ingeborg Verheul (University of Amsterdam) has a background in Dutch literature and book history and is project manager of the Amsterdam Time Machine project. Her expertise lies in connecting people and creating new initiatives in heritage (libraries and archives) and open science.

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

V.

Creative Section

DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-pt5

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

14. The Many Lives of an Amsterdam Bicycle

Pip Weytingh

Abstract: This piece of creative writing centralizes one of Amsterdam's most iconic features: the bicycle. Written from a fictional bike's perspective, it chronicles the city's changes from 1987 to 2023. Starting with a musician in the late 1980s and ending with another in post-pandemic Amsterdam Noord, the narrative follows the bike's journey through various owners—students, couriers and thieves—while witnessing cultural shifts and the rise of electric bikes. Exploring Amsterdam's evolving cityscape and diverse lives, the story connects neighbourhoods like De Jordaan and Bijlmer through the enduring presence of the bike. Through this lens, it captures the city's essence and the intertwined narratives of Amsterdam and its people.

Keywords: urban mobility; creative writing; life writing; cityscape; everyday object narratives; cultural change

When most people think of Amsterdam, they think of her canals. I'd rather think of her roads. The red-painted bike lanes. The bridges and roundabouts. The narrow *grachten* where the bikes battle the taxis for their existence until the broad silhouette of a delivery van parked up ahead determines the true king of the road. The meandering tram tracks, the closed-off construction worksites—or just the pavement, slaloming in between tourists. Amsterdam's many squares, packed with people, her many parks, packed with trees (and people). Even the ferries crossing the IJ. The entire city is our road.

If I really try, I can recall my first road. The year was 1987 when I arrived at the Frans Halsstraat, fresh from the shop. My new home was a bike rack tucked in between a massive tree with roots the size of carrots and a shabby 1970s Volkswagen collecting dust, kids drawing vulgar limbs and smiley

Rensen, Marleen, Leonieke Vermeer, Laura van Hasselt and Ernestine Hoegen, eds. *Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity: Urban Lives*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2025.
DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-14

faces on its dirt-covered windows, someone having written a sentence on its rear, which I heard passers-by say was from a famous TV show.

This is where I lived with the musician. Often, we'd come home late and drunk, sometimes he had me seriously worry he may plunge us straight into the canal at a few points. But he had a firm grip, often only steering with one hand, confident as we moved through the darkness, whistling a song—one he had just written himself. He was the restless kind. Amsterdam suited him like a new flavour does a bored tongue. I didn't think he'd leave her so soon again. I knew I wouldn't. Everything was fine. I was safe. Until the thieves got me.

It was winter 1988 and I was on Waterlooplein alongside dozens of my siblings, most of them more colourful, yet in far worse state than me. Aside from my broken lock, I was looking well, and the thieves were aware of that, putting me up front, diagonally parked in front of the others, which I thought to be a bit rude. I was also worried, because what kind of monsters would buy from a place like this?

The musician came to look for me there and took me home without exchanging a single word with the thief who watched me slip from his grasp with squinted eyes. The musician never let me sleep outside again.

The year was 1991. The musician's niece liked to take along her Walkman when we went for trips, stashed in the wide pocket of her long leather coat that kept getting stuck in my spokes if she didn't wrap it tightly around herself, listening to music, as she peddled me through the Jordaan, where we lived, patting the rhythm on my handles, the way he had as well. We didn't really go anywhere, we just followed one road as it bent around the centre like peeling off an onion's layer, until she spotted a café, a statue or a graffiti mural she liked, jumped on the breaks, and left me by myself for a little while. She loved going to the market, manoeuvring through the crowd, loading me with plastic bags full of oranges, impatiently ringing my bell. I missed the musician, but I was content. I knew she spoke with him sometimes; once she'd stuck her head outside of the door to where I was waiting in the hallway and I could hear her on the phone, assuring him that I was doing just fine and *yes* she had taken me to the repairman to have my mudguard fixed that had taken a dent. She hadn't, it made a little lisp when I sped, but I was so happy to know he still thought about me sometimes that I didn't care she lied.

Over time, the lisp grew worse, it became a painful squealing sound and the little bend started to push against my wheel, slowing me down. Now

she would sigh and groan when we had to go to her university, complaining about it as she'd impatiently yank at the bit of metal—to no avail of course, I'm sturdier than that. I tried and steel myself to her, hurt by her indifference, refusing her apologies and the sad look in her eyes as she traced the curve of my saddle with her bony fingers, but I've always had a soft heart, and all I wanted was to belong again.

I've heard it said that sometimes the way people treat others is how they really feel about themselves. I wish I'd known that then, as perhaps I'd have seen the signs earlier. How she was always alone now, her skin pasty and blotted, her legs losing their strength as we battled wind and steep bridges, and I might've realized that her sighs and grunts perhaps were less to do with my broken mudguard and more so with her own state of mind. She was unhappy, and I was not so much a cause as a part of that unhappiness.

I still miss her deeply.

It was a brisk September morning, 1994, meaning it was already light outside and I had been parked in front of the narrow house the young man lived for a few days now, sensing an anticipation that reminded me of the musician before a concert. The door opened and I was expecting the man to come out again, as he had the last few mornings when we went to his work. Instead, a woman appeared in the doorway, moving down the staircase with cautious steps, careful not to trip over her high heels. Long, silvery blond curls and a sequined top, although she wore a simple pair of joggers underneath, a handbag flung over her shoulder.

When she saw me, she smiled, waving a blond lock of hair from her face and this is when I recognized her. We were not going to work today.

A man walking past stared at her, but the queen only stood up straighter, slightly over-towering him on her heels, her long-lashed eyes staring down on him. The man merely grumbled something under his breath, and I could see the faintest shudder in the queen's posture, but the man had luckily already turned away and walked on, grumbling to himself. The queen tsk-tsked, letting a soft hand with long, glittery nails rest on my saddle.

"They'll just have to get used to us," she said, more to herself than me, or him. "Can't bury us all."

I didn't know where we were going, expecting a party of sorts, giving her attire, but instead we cycled deeper into the city's centre, until we reached a church looking out over a canal and a square. I suddenly knew where we were, feeling excitement mixed with nostalgia as this was where I had often cycled with the musician's niece those last few months. It was strange to be so close to that life, whilst being wrapped up in a new one.

When the queen stepped off, I noticed she was crying and for a split second I worried I had somehow made that happen, as if this link I felt to the musician's niece had spilt over in her. But the queen took some deep breaths, gingerly dabbing the dark skin under her eyes, careful to not smooch her make-up, muttering words of encouragement to herself. I could tell her hands were shaking and that it wasn't the cold. She swiftly pulled down her joggers, revealing the top to actually be a dress of beautiful dark glitter, reaching her knees, where she wore black laced tights underneath and she stood there for a moment, hand clasped around my handles, collecting herself before she locked me in place.

"I miss you," she whispered.
And then she softly sung a few lines of the song she'd been singing all morning:
"Oh, Mister Blue / I'm here to stay with you;
And no matter what you do;
When you're lonely / I'll be lonely too."

She then nodded, stood up straight, ignoring the fascinated looks a young couple were throwing at her as she stuffed the joggers into her black, lacquered handbag and made for the small crowd that had gathered on the square. Her feet wavered ever so slowly as they crossed the first pink triangle, pointing straight at me, where a tall man hugged her tightly.

I watched the group of twenty or so people, some dressed like she was, some others in leather, all wearing black, holding each other, singing songs, and laying down red ribbons and rainbow flags on the pink triangle pointing out to the water.

Once we got home, she gave me a rainbow sticker. I still wear it, proudly.

After him came the man in a suit. His garage reminded me of a repair shop but then without any of the calming atmosphere and with only one other bike. And though I've never been frightened of another bike before, I struggled recognizing my neighbour as one at all. What bike had such an oddly low frame and wires sticking out? What was in that box it carried with it? And what was that zooming noise? And why, whenever the man in suit came down in the morning, did he pick that one over me? Had the years really damaged me so that I was only good for being a spare?

Then one day he came down with another man, also in suit, who scoffed—not at me, as I first thought, shameful as I felt—but at the other bike, which stood simmering in the corner, its wires attaching it to the wall.

"Bit cheating, don't you think?" he called to the man in the suit, who frowned irritably. "What is your distance anyway, barely seven kilometres, no?"

"Mark my words," the man in the suit said niftily. "Give it a couple more years, and everyone will be riding these things."

I felt the shock ripple through me. He didn't actually believe that, right?! The other man shook his head with that stoic confidence you'd see men in suits display, which gave me some solace.

"No chance. Ugly monsters and they cost a fortune. Why waste a perfectly good bike," and this time, he gestured to me, "for one that will eat away your electricity bill and probably die in a year?"

The new millennium started with me at the bottom of a canal, pushed in by some careless drunken student. The feeling of the water closing over me is something I will never forget. My heavy body dragged me down with nothing I could do, not even lungs I could fill up to scream out. As my wheels bounced against the bottom, I thought I could still see the moonlight above the water. As the hours ticked by, I started becoming aware of the shapes surrounding me in the dark and they filled me with dread. They were all bikes. I was in a graveyard.

Maybe this was death. As close as a bike could get to it.

Lying in the water, with nothing to do but try and accept my fate, I found myself dreaming. Of the musician, of cycling the familiar route to his studio on the Spuistraat. I imagined the potholes in the road, the wind pushing against us as we cycled alongside the Singel, a raggedy man in a large poncho shouting after us, a woman dancing on the pavement with her eyes half-closed. I dreamed of his niece, of hearing her laugh again as we halted in front of the statue of the blue violin player, one of her favourites. I dreamed of the queen, whipping back her glorious hair as we headed towards the Reguliersdwarsstraat, to one of her bars. But mostly, I dreamed of Amsterdam. I'd seen all her roads, her bike lanes, her bridges and crossroads, and I knew she loved me, the way a tough mother loves her child. That I belonged here. I took solace in that, even as I was rusting away at the bottom of a canal, that I was still part of her cityscape.

Two weeks later they fished me out and gave me a new set of wheels, to be sold at a warehouse sale.

The year was 2008 and the car came out of nowhere. Despite his enhanced state, the orange courier had proven himself a skilled cyclist and he always made sure my light was working properly before we set off on one of his delivery routes, so I knew he was just as surprised as me. One moment we

were singing about hearing "Jerusalem's bells ringing" (whoever that may be), and the next I was on my side, my front on the pavement, my back still on the road, a massive dent in my wheel alerting me of something being terribly wrong. I heard people yell out as they ran towards the bright orange lying a few metres away. A man hoisted me off the street and since my stand had apparently been bent, too, he just left me there on my side before he rushed to try and help the courier up into a sitting position.

I felt a little like I had when I went into the canal. As the courier was taken to hospital, someone had prodded me up against the wall and left me there. As time passed, nobody came to collect me. The night turned into day again and as it got dark once more, a van pulled up in front of me, their boot already filled with other abandoned bikes. "Thieves," I thought. Yet they didn't act like thieves, with their flaring lights and fluorescent clothing, they rather acted like I was the one breaking the law. They noisily grabbed me and threw me in the back, and I didn't even care anymore. I was just tired, tired of being thrown around like mere junk. I missed being a thing of value, a possession to be cherished. But who could cherish me? A pile of scrap metal, with a crooked wheel and a rusty frame. Even my rainbow sticker had nearly faded. But a bike can't give up. And so I grew stronger, handed down from mother to daughter to friend to garage sale.

I had only been with the new musician for a year when suddenly everything closed, and I spent days on end in the little front garden of his family home, where he still lived, watching empty streets and wondering why we never went anywhere anymore. The only times we cycled was when we just rode around aimlessly, which reminded me a little of the musician's niece, thus rightfully worrying me. The new musician seemed unhappy, too, and I wished I had the ability to understand what was going on—why everything seemed to have come to a stop, why we didn't go to his studio anymore, why we didn't see anybody—if I could do something to help this time.

Imagine that—to be a bike at the end of the world!

And then one day we cycled towards a hospital, where other people, in face masks, keeping their distance, stood in an orderly queue and I realized something was wrong, that it was the whole city, not just us in Noord. The new musician seemed stressed as he locked me, softly swearing behind his mask, and I felt stressed, too. All the while as I waited there, I had to think of the queen that day at the pink triangles. Of all her friends.

It was sunny when the new musician stopped in front of a deli shop around the corner of the Westerkerk, where I hadn't been in a long while, then picked

up his phone and laughed at something his boyfriend said. I immediately recognized the way his voice changed when he was talking to him. I had met him for the first time some weeks ago. He had whistled as the new musician had pulled me up the pavement, smiling a little sheepishly.

"Look at that Chevrolet!," the boyfriend had said as he took me in. "Is this from before the war?"

"Oh, she's old," said the new musician with a groan, but I could tell he meant it fondly. "But do you see that?"

And the boyfriend squatted down next to me as he squinted at my rear. "Wait," he whispered. "Is that a…?"

"Rainbow. Must be from the *sixties* by the looks of it," smiled the new musician.

I now watched him go inside as a spray of rain started to tickle me. I didn't mind, found it rather refreshing actually. I calmly observed a group of tourists cycle pass on very bright yellow bikes, their saddles far too low to peddle up the bridge, struggling to go in a straight line and I was happy I was parked here and not stuck behind them.

"Won't you look at that?"

I must've been dreaming. I told myself I was dreaming as the familiar voice pierced through my consciousness. I had dreamed this many times, after all.

"Dad?"

"That's just my old bike."

"You think that thing would still be around?"

"Don't you underestimate an old Batavus like that, sweetheart. They last a lifetime, they do."

The new musician walked out of the deli with a wrapped sandwich in his hand, his eyes meeting those of the leather-clad man stood next to a motorcycle, and a young woman, also in leather, standing next to him. She looked a lot like him.

"Can I help you?," the new musician asked with that always present city-person's suspicion as he observed the strange man eying what was his.

"Oh, no, sorry," said the old musician apologetically, his voice heavier than I'd ever heard it, sporting a beard now, but I could've sworn I still spotted the golden glint of an earring. "Just admiring your bike. Used to have one just like it."

And you haven't forgotten me. The musician's eyes landed on me as he cocked an eyebrow, and I pretended it was because he could hear me. I'd never wanted something so much in my life.

I haven't forgotten you, either, I told him, just in case.

"You take care of it," the musician said, sounding oddly emotional as his eyes kept on me a moment longer, a hint of surprise in there before they turned back to the new musician. "After all, that is Amsterdam, right there."

I thought the new musician would just ignore the old one and leave, but he cleared his throat and nodded, putting a protective hand on my saddle. "Yeah," he simply said. "I know."

About the Author

Pip Weytingh is a writer and a PhD-candidate at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. With a Masters from the University of Amsterdam, and a BA from Goldsmiths University, her interests lie in creative writing, life writing and literary studies. Having published several short stories in literary magazines, she is currently working on her first literary novel, a work of dystopian fiction.

15. Reflection: Life Writing and Creative Writing

Pip Weytingh

Abstract: This text deals with the role creative writing can play in the field of life writing. Emphasising both life writing's general goals and obstacles, the text underlines the ways in which the fictional can add to the already existing discourse by expanding on, rather than discarding, life writing's modes of narrative and focus on authenticity. Functioning as a reflection piece on the accompanying creative text, consequently using it as an example, it explores creative writing's own purpose – to tell a story that can be both true and untrue at the same time. Highlighting the incompleteness of a creative text as its biggest asset, the text argues that creative writing fits neatly with life writing's discourse concerning truthfulness and storytelling. Taking from the works of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson on life writing's already unusual place within the humanities and literature, as well as Joan Didion's personal take on what exactly constitutes a creative work, the text weaves together the telling of a life with the telling of a story. It argues not per se for a comparable narrative between, but rather for an aligning purpose for both.

Keywords: creative writing; life writing; storytelling; cultural analysis

I turned silence and nights into words. What was unutterable, I wrote down. I made the whirling world stand still.
– Rimbaud[1]

What is life writing but a discourse?

A correspondence between an unmovable fact, a point in time; life as a fixed concept, and life as a process; a constant flow, a multi-faceted narrative; a continuous happening.

1 Arthur Rimbaud, *Complete Works* (HarperCollins, 2008), 232.

Rensen, Marleen, Leonieke Vermeer, Laura van Hasselt and Ernestine Hoegen, eds. *Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity: Urban Lives*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2025.
DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-15

In life writing, it can feel as if a choice needs to be made. What exactly do we want to tell? Stay as close to precision and facts as is possible, or venture further into fictional speculation for the sake of delivering the story whole? One can only say, "We do not know" so many times before losing some of one's resolution. Yet straying too far from factuality might undermine the story's authenticity altogether. Then again, what can we say of these facts, this life, without the vast context that propels them? We know that a life cannot reasonably be measured by a chain of causalities. Every "how" and "why" stems from a myriad of variable factors that are perhaps only known to the person in question—if at all.

This is a problem many life writers may encounter, unable to appease either side in our attempt to remain genuine in our narrativization. Craig Howes explains how life writers are often "dismissed by writers as tied to 'theory' or 'criticism'" whilst they are simultaneously considered "far less 'academic' than the roster of 'distinguished'; biographers and biographies would seem to be."[2]

One then finds oneself drifting in this strange twilight zone that we named "life writing." A place where biographies, historical accounts but also oral stories and diaries meet. As the Oxford Centre for Life-Writing defines this relatively new discipline: "life-writing involves, and goes beyond, biography." Adding: "Life-writing has to do with emotions, it has to do with memory, and it has to do with a sense of identity. Life-writing is a vital form of cultural communication."[3]

Again, this concept of communication, of discourse. Life writing seems to be about the act of communicating both the concept and what goes beyond it. Not just a biographical account, but the memories, the emotions, and the sense of self that encompass it. The question, then, is simply how to go about this.

The idea brings to mind Joan Didion's 1976 essay "Why I Write," in which she explains her creative writing as a means of studying the "shimmer around the edges."[4] In other words, to uncover what is *beyond* the simple facts. Didion, in her essay, mostly focuses on the act of writing, not so much as the written product, but I believe they are intrinsically linked. After all, once she shares her creative writing with her readers, they may then

2 Craig Howes, "What Are We Turning From?," *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History*, ed. Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma (Routledge, 2016), 173.

3 Oxford Centre for Life-Writing, "What Is Life-Writing?," 2020, https://oclw.web.ox.ac.uk/what-life-writing.

4 Joan Didion, "Why I Write," *New York Times*, 5 December 1967, https://www.nytimes.com/1976/12/05/archives/why-i-write-why-i-write.html.

discover the same shimmer—or possibly a whole new different one, as I shall get to in a moment.

This line of thinking in turn reminds me of the Arthur Rimbaud quote I opened this piece with. "What was unutterable, I wrote down," he brags, explaining the power of poetry. An oxymoron, someone more pragmatic could say, but that is precisely the point. Because it is here, I believe, in this supposed impossibility, the writing of that which cannot be uttered, that creative writing, be it poetry or prose or any other form, can come to play a vital part in what we call life writing. Let me explain.

To tell a story we ask for two things from a reader. To believe and to complete. Whether we assure them the facts we provide are truthful, or whether we want them to imagine themselves in the year 3000 on a different planet, we need their cooperation to succeed. "Bear with me," we say, as we construe a world, a plane, a narrative, through which we tell what we truly desire to share. And once they believe, the reader performs their second task. They complete our text. In the words we deliver, however strongly we have bound it together with facts and proclamations, there always is that tiny space left that allows the reader to squeeze in and make their own. The space between the sentences. The gap between a fact and the words that carry it.

And it is this space, this gap, where creative writing can truly come to fruition. That is not to say that no work of non-fiction can achieve a similar goal. To the contrary, the boundary between life writing and what I will call creative writing is at times, as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson claim, "a fluid boundary."[5] In comparison to history writing, for example, to reduce a work of life writing to "facticity is to strip it of the densities of rhetorical, literary, ethical, political and cultural dimensions."[6] Whether the presence of such dimensions is a conscious choice, simply to add plot and narrative to a historical account, or an accidental by-product of one's own political, cultural or personal stance on said account, the result is the same: a creative interpretation. Similarly, creative writing also has its own binds, namely, the author being "bound [...] by the reader's expectations of internal consistency in the world of verisimilitude created within the novel."[7]As such, a writer shapes one's own boundaries by the very (fictional)

5 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, "Life Narratives: Definitions and Distinctions," in *Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, ed. Kai Schaffer and Sidonie Smith (University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 12.

6 Ibid., 13.

7 Ibid., 12.

world and literary rhetoric they themselves have created. What may be fantastical but true in history, would simply be unbelievable within the framework of fiction.

Still, I would argue that to a certain degree, for the sake of credibility, a text of non-fiction must try to close off as many of these aforementioned gaps as it possibly can, thus entering a contract with the reader that assures them of the text's efforts to only permit a reasonable amount of subjectivity—simply put; that this is still a true story, these facts have been verified. At the very least, it operates within the framework of our shared reality. A creative text does the opposite. It pricks holes in its very fabric, entertains multiple intonations at once. It creates its own reality, in which a fact can be both true and untrue. Creative writing's default is to wonder out loud. It provokes interpretation. A creative text, after all, relies on its own incompleteness. Very crudely put, it exists only within its own narrative and is brought to life only by one's reading of it.

I would once again reiterate that it is important to keep in mind that every one of these types of writing have their own relevance. To quote the Oxford Centre for Life-Writing's take on life writing: "it encompasses everything [...] from the fictional to the factional."[8] My aim here is simply to advocate for the fictional as a viable part of life writing.

I shall use my own short story as an example here. When thinking about Amsterdam, both from a personal perspective and in more general terms, the first and most prominent thing that came to me was the image of a bicycle. It connected me to my father living here in the 1980s, to friends moving here from abroad, to my own experience as feeling truly a part of this city after many years away. As such, I wanted to centralize this bike as the gravitational point around which the entire narrative would revolve. A famous cultural analysis approach follows the saying (to paraphrase Mieke Bal in her "Lexicon for Cultural Analysis"): let the object speak back to you.[9] This is something I wanted to take literally.

Now, none of my readers (and I am making assumptions here) genuinely believes this bike to be sentient, nor will they demand watertight proof of what this bicycle all endured to even consider it true. But for a brief moment, in order to simply read the story, they may believe it just enough to follow along with the narrative. The story is both true and untrue at the same time.

8 Oxford Centre for Life-Writing, "What Is Life-Writing?"

9 Mieke Bal, "Lexicon for Cultural Analysis," 6 December 2013, 11, https://www.unilu.ch/fileadmin/fakultaeten/ksf/institute/kuwifo/Team_Previsic/Mieke_Bal_Lexicon_english.pdf.

The sentient bicycle is untrue, but what the bike tells us has a truthfulness to it. I do not think anybody is upset with me for speaking in the voice of a bike, calling me a fraud, and thus dismissing the entire story as a load of nonsense, because it is rather obvious what my intention is, especially in light of this entire volume. The bike is a narrative device I am using to tell a bigger story. That of Amsterdam.

As a creative writer I observe and I describe, much like any life writer. I, too, aim to tell a story, may also try to convey a sense of identity, to present a meeting point of a life as a concept and life as a happening. But as a creative writer, I am in the cheeky position to do so whilst loosening the factual binds altogether, without losing credibility. I never made a contract with the reader saying the following would be a true story. I simply said it would be a story, and that there is truth in there.

My point is that creative writing allows for an even more creative take on life writing without moving that far away from its initial goal. The aim is still to tell a life's story in all its complexity. Something that is always, to a certain degree, incomplete; there is always a hint of subjectivity and ambivalence, a balance to be sought between feelings and facts. Even if you were to think back on your own life, of which you have more insight than anyone in the world, it may be difficult to find the linear causality you recognize from history books there. Is it not all connected, all those memories and feelings and realizations, showing your life as a web spreading out all around you, more than a rope ladder simply going up, with you, present you, writer you, right in the middle of its weavings, influencing the entire process as well by the mere act of writing it down? By trying to make sense of it, you, inevitably, *make* sense of it.

And why would that subjectivity, that manifestation, be any less truthful? If you choose to tell a story, that of your own life, or someone else's, or, in this case, that of a city, there will always be parts of you present. That is the nature of storytelling. Life writing is no different. In fact, life writing seems to understand this better than anything.

I strongly believe that creative writing does not diminish the reality of a life lived, it merely helps offer even more perspectives, which, in turn, may elicit a broader understanding overall. It can provide a different lens, question what seemed solid before, thus inevitably altering a reader's perception of its supposed solidness and thus of other solid things alongside it.

And how can that be done? Any life writer works with both facts as well as metaphors, analogies and imagery. We all use plot, narrative, literary devices to help provide a story. We use grammar and perspective to convey our message. And, as a creative writer, I take that even further. I start out

from these literary devices, the narrative itself, and work my way back to the subject in question. I give you an imaginary bike, to take you through Amsterdam's changing cityscape. Make of that what you will. And the thing with such imagery is the fact it is never fully complete. It needs to be built again, and again.

You read my sentence. You know what I mean, you think you know what I mean, you know what you think I mean. I do too. We meet halfway. That is what I mean by incomplete. Through language, grammar and metaphor, I arrange the image. You bring it to life through your reading of it. I give you the pieces of the puzzle. You complete it. We are in discourse. Unbound by facts, aided by grammar. And who knows what you will find in your quest of completing it? Instead of having only me, the text's writer, chisel away at uncovering the truth, I make you, the reader, part of this discovery. I wonder what your shimmers will find. The true importance of my job lies in making the text I offer you entertaining enough for you to want to try. I will then hide the unutterable in the spokes of my wheels.

The humble truth is that as a creative writer, I do not provide answers or discoveries either, I merely provide wonder. Hopefully the right kind. Yet, when trying to communicate a life, just like in any conversation, sometimes, a note of wonder is all one needs.

Bibliography

Bal, Mieke. "Lexicon for Cultural Analysis." 6 December 2013. https://www.unilu.ch/fileadmin/fakultaeten/ksf/institute/kuwifo/Team_Previsic/Mieke_Bal_Lexicon_english.pdf.

Didion, Joan. "Why I Write." *New York Times*, 5 December 1967. https://www.nytimes.com/1976/12/05/archives/why-i-write-why-i-write.html.

Howes, Craig. "What Are We Turning From?" In *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History*, edited by Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma, 165–75. Routledge, 2016.

Oxford Centre for Life-Writing. "What Is Life-Writing?" 2020. https://oclw.web.ox.ac.uk/what-life-writing.

Rimbaud, Arthur. *Complete Works.* HarperCollins, 2008.

Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. "Life Narratives: Definitions and Distinctions." In *Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, edited by Kai Schaffer and Sidonie Smith. University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

About the Author

Pip Weytingh is a writer and a PhD-candidate at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. With a Masters from the University of Amsterdam, and a BA from Goldsmiths University, her interests lie in creative writing, life writing and literary studies. Having published several short stories in literary magazines, she is currently working on her first literary novel, a work of dystopian fiction.

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

16. The Mega-Mosaics of Fabrice Hünd: Life Writing in Shards of Amsterdam

Cornelia Doornekamp

Abstract: This visual essay introduces four of the mega-mosaics (*Mega-mozaïeken*) created by local artist Fabrice Hünd (1961–2021) on buildings throughout the city of Amsterdam. Using waste materials such as glass and ceramics, he aimed not only to decorate the city, but also to establish contact with and between people in his environment. His art incorporates facets of pictorial life writing, referring to his life-long existence in the De Pijp area and also drawing inspiration from the lives of historical figures from the city. Altogether the mega-mosaics create a colourful image of Amsterdam, revealing and shaping the multiple layers of life in the city in past and present.

Keywords: urban art; material reuse; community engagement; De Pijp; public memory; visual storytelling

Introduction

Amsterdam-born artist Fabrice Hünd (1961–2021) made his first "mural" when he was five years old. Two holes in the ceiling of his bedroom looked down at him in a frightening manner and a crack looked like a mouth that could eat him. He climbed a step and drew two horse heads from those holes and the crack. Then he was no longer afraid. Unknowingly, this action was the beginning of his artist's life. As he himself thought later, "my inner resources are very rich, because I can create beauty with my hands. It all starts with imagination."[1] His artistic practice was an imaginative undertaking which aimed to aesthetically embellish his environment and make it more friendly

1 Interview with Fabrice Hünd in Cornelia Doornekamp, *Fabrice Hünd* (cornelia art&consort, 2017). Translated by Justina Kiss.

Rensen, Marleen, Leonieke Vermeer, Laura van Hasselt and Ernestine Hoegen, eds. *Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity: Urban Lives*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2025.
DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-16

and familiar. Over the years, he expanded his area from his room to the neighbourhood and the city at large. Fabrice's art incorporates facets of pictorial life writing; if only loosely, his works of art refer to his life in the De Pijp area in Amsterdam and some are specifically inspired by the lives of historical figures from the city. Altogether they create a colourful image of Amsterdam, revealing and shaping the multiple layers of life in the city in past and present.

During the time Fabrice was studying at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam (1980–85), the curriculum still saw drawing as the foundation of artistry and nature as the basis for art. In the years after his graduation the norm of abstraction and minimalism in art gained ground, but after many years of experimenting with form and colour, Fabrice stayed true to figurative drawing and painting. He developed an authentic, recognizable style rooted in expressionism. The subjects of his artworks are predominantly uncomplicated, often depicted in a hybrid shape or intertwined with each other: plants, animals, means of transportation, Amsterdam buildings and street scenes, women and eyes. The subjects were often of minor importance for Fabrice. With dancing lines, bright colours and deformation of realistic elements he sought direct expression of his inner world, delicately in his drawings as well as with rough brushstrokes in his paintings and so he invented his own pictographic script.

When he started to use the mosaic technique, Fabrice called it "painting with shards" ("schilderen met scherven"). Just as he began his paintings and drawings by setting the lines, he began the mosaic by applying lines in shards of dark colour on the chosen base to capture the overall image. Thrown away as refuse, he found plenty of glass and ceramic material on the pavement or in the bulk waste in the city and inhabitants offered materials to incorporate in the mosaics: fossils, ancient Portuguese, Spanish and Moroccan tiles, shards of broken crockery, glass and natural stone, buckets full of marbles, antique African glass beads, a collection of ceramics and Delft blue tiles found in the disturbed soil in Amsterdam construction sites, shells and chunks of marble. So besides the story told by Fabrice's imagery, the shards themselves tell stories about the history of Amsterdam and its inhabitants.

In this essay, four of the seven mega-mosaics (*Megamozaïeken*), as Fabrice called the works of art he created in Amsterdam in the years 2006–21, are described and their relationship with the history of Amsterdam and its inhabitants explored.[2] Research for this chapter is mainly based on

2 The other three are: the diamond-look mosaic *Nijntje* (Miffy, 2018) on Paulus Potterstraat, just behind the Rijksmuseum; the mosaic *Agua Costa* (2013) on Da Costakade marking the

interviews and personal communications during fourteen years of working and living together with Fabrice, as well as his own documentation, which is not publicly available.[3]

The Murals

In the 1980s, in Amsterdam neighbourhoods such as De Pijp and Staatsliedenbuurt, housing of inferior quality, which had been built due to Amsterdam's rapidly growing population in the nineteenth century, was left to deteriorate. Buildings were demolished and wooden fences erected around the construction sites. Cafés and coffee shops dealing in drugs became a problem and were closed down. The façades of the buildings in which they were located were boarded up. For Fabrice, however, this development represented an opportunity. He started painting the boarded-up façades, fences and decayed walls.

The murals Fabrice created were rough, the work had to be done quickly, because in those days it was illegal to create large murals, unlike nowadays. His images spoke of what he saw happening on the street or what he imagined might be happening behind a door or a façade. It was never his intention to offer political commentary or social criticism with his work. He worked outside to brighten up the unwelcoming surroundings but also to connect with the public in order to get attention for the more personal and thoughtful drawings and paintings, which he created in his studio.[4]

From Paint to Shard ("Van Verf naar Scherf")

Fabrice had been pondering the idea of turning the murals into sustainable "vandal proof" ("*hufterproof*") recycling art for quite some time, as the murals he had created over the years in Amsterdam were gradually disappearing. This was mostly due to redevelopment of the boarded-up buildings and the construction of new housing complexes. He started to experiment with

twentieth anniversary of Amsterdam's only operating bathhouse and sauna, Da Costa; the mosaic *Hoofdzaakliefde* (Principally love) on Hoofddorpplein, created on a transformer house in 2011 and professionally removed and stored in 2020 in consultation with Fabrice because the transformer house was being rebuilt.

3 Fabrice Hund, Hünd family private archives, Amsterdam.

4 Cornelia Doornekamp, *Fabrice Hünd* (cornelia art&consort, 2017), 21–25.

applying shards of various sizes and types of ceramics in lines on the mural he had created on the cylindrical building on Marie Heinekenplein, where the firebreak opens for the adjoining apartments. The mural (2000) was applied with concrete paint on a strong layer of stucco, but it nevertheless turned out to be prone to damage, as bicycles were constantly being put against it. The lines of shards appeared to offer more protection against damage, and thus in the mosaic technique Fabrice had found a way to preserve his murals as long as possible and to express himself with shards in more sustainable outdoor artworks.

Fig. 16.1. *Het Kompas* ("The Compass"), 2006. Mosaic by Fabrice Hünd. 250 cm x 1000 cm. Marie Heinekenplein, Amsterdam. Photo: Stefan Nieuwenhuijs.

It took several more years of experimenting and mastering the new technique before the entire mural of the building on Marie Heinekenplein was converted into mosaic. The challenge was to place the shards, each with its own specific shape, close together, leaving minimal joints between them in order to construct the strongest mosaic possible. As the building turned out to be virtually at the geographical centre of Amsterdam, the title *Het Kompas* (The compass) emerged and the images were given the theme of the four cardinal points.

On the north side of the mosaic, we see the polar bear peacefully next to the Inuit. The west side shows a Native American woman, the orangutan on the east side represents the Asian world. On the south side, a character with dark skin stands for the African continent. The imagery is a reflection of what Amsterdam life and citizens mean for Fabrice: colourful diversity and loving connection with each other. The many fantasy creatures peeking around the sharded world show his curiosity-driven nature.

Fig. 16.2. *Scherven van Beschaving* ("Shards of Culture") 2010. Mosaic by Fabrice Hünd. 200 cm x 800 cm. Wijttenbachstraat/Pontanusstraat, Amsterdam. Photo: Roy Tee © 2013.

The renovated Amsterdam train station Muiderpoort was designed with two platforms, connected by a wide pedestrian tunnel in 1939. However, over the years, the tunnel became bare and gloomy and passengers rushed through it, feeling unsafe. After World War II, the station was nicknamed "Muidermoord" Station ("*moord*" meaning "murder") because it was used during the war as a boarding point for Jews, who were then deported. To create a more friendly atmosphere, Fabrice was commissioned by Nederlandse Spoorwegen (Dutch Railways) to paint the walls of the tunnel in 1993. The walls covered an area of 200 square metres, which Fabrice painted with his now famous cheerful fantasy creatures in fluorescent colours.

The mural was meant to be temporary: in 1997, the station was renovated and the tunnel closed. Nothing remained of the mural in the tunnel. After seventeen years, a small part still recalled the big project: the painting on the tile platform on the wall of the station next to the viaduct on Wijttenbachstraat. The original fluorescent colours had faded and therefore offered Fabrice a second opportunity to turn a mural into a mosaic, while maintaining its 1993 monumental imagery. As Fabrice puts it: "This imagery is a melting pot of cultures, like Amsterdam itself. This mosaic is my gift

to society and that's my pleasure."[5] This mosaic was realized in the period when the big national demonstration against budget cuts in culture took place on 20 November 2010, for which the slogan was "Nederland schreeuwt om cultuur" ("The Netherlands cries out for culture"). Hence the title of the mosaic: shouts and shards up in arms against the breaking down of culture in the Netherlands. Jeroen van Spijk, at the time alderman for arts and culture in Amsterdam Oost, unveiled the mosaic as "een bijdrage aan een fijne en goede woonomgeving" ("a contribution to a pleasant and good living environment").[6] The character on the left side of the mosaic is smoking a pipe. It refers to the Amsterdam neighbourhood De Pijp ("*pijp*" meaning "pipe"), where Fabrice was born and lived his entire life.

Fig. 16.3. *In den Bescherfden Schuyt* ("The Sharded Schuyt"), 2012. Mosaic by Fabrice Hünd. 250 cm x 1500 cm. Cornelis Schuytstraat/Willemsparkweg, Amsterdam. Photo: Stefan Nieuwenhuijs.

The hexagonally constructed transformer house, a small building housing electrical equipment, at the intersection of Willemsparkweg and Cornelis Schuytstraat had become an eyesore for business owners in the area because the building had fallen into disrepair. The business owners addressed the municipality with a request to have the dark block removed several times, but without success. However, Fabrice's initiative to cover the building

5 Lida Geers, "Fabrice schenkt Oost een mozaïek," *IJopener*, December 2010, https://www.oost-online.nl/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2010_12.pdf, trans. Cornelia Doornekamp.
6 Ibid., 29.

with mosaics changed their minds. The Liander company—manager of the transformer house—had the advertising signs removed from the building and the roof and roof slates restored and painted.

Although Cornelis Schuyt (1557–1616) was a composer and an organist, his surname evokes associations with water, sea and sailing ("*schuyt*" meaning "boat"). Hence, the theme chosen for this mosaic was "ocean and land." On the southeast side, the sea god rises from the waves with a boat on his head. The face is clearly recognizable from a great distance. The seductive gaze Fabrice managed to put into the eyes of the face seems determined to draw the viewer into the image and evokes curiosity about what there is to see around the corner. Walking around the building to the right, on each consecutive part of the building the lines of blue shards continue as the ocean; shells, an octopus, fish and a starfish appear under the loving eye of the mermaid. Bacchus lies feasting on wine: an indispensable indulgence of sailors and a reference to the *Bourgondisch* lifestyle (meaning "loving and living the good life"), which Fabrice enjoyed. We then dive deeper into the ocean, where a sperm whale and a dolphin swim and shells decorate the seabed. Then the shore comes into sight, where a sailor's faithful wife looks forward to a safe homecoming. Finally, we arrive on solid ground in a landscape of mountains and trees with human and animal inhabitants. The entire scene is reminiscent of a journey Fabrice makes in his imagination while working.

As he created the mosaic, many passers-by stopped to watch and sometimes told stories about their lives and their ties with Amsterdam. Neighbours offered coffee and refreshments and also got to know each other better.

Artistically, Fabrice saw great freedom in this project. Without restriction, he could indulge in line play and the use of materials to express in shards his fantasy world. Like himself, his creatures look happy and cheerful, whether it's a bird, a dolphin or a mother reaching for her child. Several layers of shards were applied on top of each other, creating the three-dimensional structure characteristic of Fabrice's mosaics, with the term "mega-mosaic" ("*Megamozaïek*") originating from this work.[7]

In 2021, the Oscar Carré primary school in Eerste Jan van der Heijdenstraat celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. To mark this anniversary, Fabrice was commissioned to create a mosaic on the metal fence located on the

7 The working process is captured in a documentary: Marlijn Franken, *Schilderen met Scherven* (2013), https://www.vimeo.com/76034209.

Fig. 16.4. *Circus*, 2021. Mosaic by Fabrice Hünd. 3 of 18 panels measuring 80 cm x 60 cm. Eerste Jan van der Heydenstraat 161, Amsterdam. Photo: Cornelia Doornekamp.

pavement in front of the school building, in collaboration with the school's 350 pupils. Since Oscar Carré (1845–1911) managed to make the circus a great success and was responsible for building the famous circus theatre on the Amstel in Amsterdam, it was obvious that the theme for the mosaic should be the circus. The pupils each made a drawing on the theme measuring 15 cm x 15 cm, and these drawings were to form the basis for the design of the mosaic. Given the size of the fence and the available funds, the drawings were classified according to subject: circus tents, clowns, lions jumping through a ring of fire, acrobats, horse acts, jugglers, elephants and a popcorn cannon. Initially, the pupils were also to have a part in the realization of the mosaic. However, it was decided that this would be too laborious and perhaps not safe, either, as the mosaic technique involves cutting shards to size with mosaic pliers and gluing sharp pieces of stone and glass with a synthetic glue. Also, grouting and sanding glued shards is not really an activity you would want to entrust to children.

Fabrice managed to faithfully incorporate some eighty drawings into his design with the addition of fantasy creatures in his own visual language to suggest an audience. The remaining drawings were given a place by subject in eighteen of the thirty-six panels that made up the fence. In his design, he visually constructed each panel as an independent mosaic painting. Side by side, he eighteen panels simultaneously form a continuous image of a merry, dancing and colourful circus landscape.

Conclusion

Tens of thousands of shards, all related to the city, are joined together in the mega-mosaics described above to represent otherwise unseen features of the history of Amsterdam and its inhabitants. Also, the mega-mosaics come together as a publicly accessible unique self-portrait of Fabrice Hünd, an Amsterdam artist who collected waste material, cut it into all these shards and arranged them on non-descript, empty walls—like words in a written story on a blank sheet of paper—in order to transform them into sustainable artworks. And thus life writing in shards, expressing his wish during his lifetime and for the future: to have the viewer share in his feeling of happiness and love of life and Amsterdam.

Bibliography

Doornekamp, Cornelia. *Fabrice Hünd.* cornelia art&consort, 2017.

Geers, Lida. "Fabrice schenkt Oost een mozaïek." *IJopener*, December 2010. https://www.oost-online.nl/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2010_12.pdf.

Hünd, Fabrice. Hünd family private archives, Amsterdam.

About the Author

Cornelia Doornekamp graduated in scenography from the Gerrit Rietveld Akademie, Amsterdam. After a career as a costume designer, she worked closely together with Amsterdam artist Fabrice Hünd for fourteen years. In 2017, she published a book about his work and life.

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

17. Exploring Urban Lives of Amsterdam through Mezrab: Belonging and Community Building via Storytelling

Ceren Gülbudak

Abstract: This chapter explores spaces of diversity in Amsterdam, focusing on storytelling as epitomized by Mezrab. Founded in 2004 by Sahand Sahebdivani's family, political refugees from Iran, Mezrab began as a familial gathering and grew into a vibrant cultural hub. Its evolution, including a crowdfunding-supported move to Veemkade in 2014, highlights its communal importance. Mezrab fosters inclusion as illustrated through its distinctive prompts—microphones, inviting couches and a communal carpet—encouraging spontaneous participation. Storytelling is central, featuring short stories, songs and performances from nine storytellers across three sessions. This open stage builds trust and community as people share and listen to each other's stories. Drawing from personal observations, this chapter examines Mezrab's role in fostering belonging and community in urban spaces.

Keywords: participatory culture; oral tradition; migrants; Iranian diaspora; cultural hubs; inclusive spaces

Introduction

Urbanization and migration have significantly transformed the social fabric of cities in the twenty-first century. As cities become more diverse, migrants face the challenge of adapting to new environments while maintaining their cultural identities. Often, this process can lead to feelings

Rensen, Marleen, Leonieke Vermeer, Laura van Hasselt and Ernestine Hoegen, eds. *Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity: Urban Lives*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2025.
DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-17

of isolation and disconnection. Urban storytelling, a practice rooted in sharing personal and communal narratives, can be approached as a powerful tool to bridge cultural exchange, foster belonging, and create community bonds.

With a long history of migration and openness, the city provides fertile ground for exploring how storytelling can serve as a means of belonging and expression for its diverse population. Mezrab, the "House of Stories" located in the eastern part of Amsterdam, blends oral storytelling, music and community. It serves as a microcosm of the city's spirit of inclusivity, in that it offers both migrants and locals a space to reflect on their personal journeys, share experiences, and connect with one another.

My first experience at Mezrab began with hesitation. A childhood friend had promised to take me to "a beautiful place you'll immediately love," but I was sceptical, thinking, "I'm not in the mood for performances; let's just sit and chat over a coffee." As we strolled along Piet Heinkade, I had no real interest in attending a typical cultural event. However, once we entered the venue—a space that seemed intentionally designed to bring people together and make everyone feel welcome—my perspective changed. The storyteller, Emi, a trans woman, shared a deeply personal account of her struggles with her daughter. It wasn't merely a performance; it was an intimate moment, connecting the storyteller and the audience.

Following that visit, Mezrab became my first place to go when visiting Amsterdam. Between August and November 2023, I have regularly attended Friday and Wednesday storytelling nights at Mezrab, listening to approximately eighty stories shared with audiences ranging from two to three hundred people each night. I also volunteered for one evening during an Amsterdam Klezmer Band concert, attended three MezJams—improvising Anatolian songs from Greece, Azerbaijan and Armenia with diverse musicians from around the world—and engaged with numerous individuals. Through these experiences, I developed a sense of belonging and emotional connection to the space, forming a support system that made Amsterdam feel like "home."

As a scholar trained in the social sciences, I became fascinated by Mezrab and reflected on potential ways of studying how storytelling practices are not merely artistic expressions, but fundamental to community building and belonging in the urban fabric. What follows is a reflection on Mezrab, informed by academic theories, to make sense of my enthusiasm.

The Story of the Home of Storytelling

> *A* mezrāb/zakhmeh (*also spelled* mizrab) *or* (*also spelled as* zakhma) *or* mızrap (*Turkish*) *is a plectrum which is used for several Iranian and Indian string instruments, "a tiny thing that produces a big resonance."*
> – Sahand Sahebdivani[1]

The story of Mezrab is also a personal one, tied to the journey of the Sahebdivani family. Sahand Sahebdivani, along with his family, fled Iran as political refugees in 1983. In Amsterdam, they began gathering with friends and strangers, sharing stories, songs and food. This humble beginning as an intimate family gathering has grown into a dynamic cultural institution called Mezrab, where individuals from diverse backgrounds come together to share stories, songs, and lived experiences. Over the course of twenty years, Mezrab welcomed audiences of two to three hundred people. It changed locations to accommodate its growing community. In 2014, a crowdfunding campaign enabled the move to its current location at Veemkade, a space that has since become a home for storytelling in Amsterdam.

Storytelling nights at Mezrab occur at least twice a week, where anyone is welcome to share a story. The host facilitates the evening, creating a warm and welcoming environment. The stories span a wide range of themes and styles—traditional, modern, ethnic, jazz-inflected—and are presented in various languages, including Persian, Turkish, Armenian, Afrikaans, English and Dutch. The events feature improvisation and storytelling through music, offering a rich tapestry of cultural expression. Storytellers and audiences alike have diverse cultural and national backgrounds and encompass refugees, migrants, students, visitors, artists and the unemployed as well as family members and friends, creating a vibrant and diverse urban space. Dutch-speaking locals are present as well, especially those who feel comfortable with the English language.

As much as Mezrab celebrates the art of storytelling, its popularity also reflects its socio-economic accessibility. Amsterdam is an expensive city, and socializing can be particularly challenging for foreigners, many of whom have unstable or limited incomes. Mezrab's affordability is based on its free or donation-based model. This kind of inclusivity makes it a rare space where diverse individuals can come together without financial barriers, highlighting its unique role as a hub for connection and cultural exchange.

1 From an interview with Sahand Sahebdivani by Angelica Vigilante.

At its core, Mezrab is defined by three simple elements: a microphone, couches and a carpet. These unassuming prompts set the stage for an act of storytelling that brings people together through short stories, songs and performances. The stage is open for anyone to join spontaneously, with each night offering three sessions and around nine storytellers, who take the stage to share deeply personal tales that explore themes of migration, identity, love, loss and belonging. These evenings create a shared space for connection, expression and reflection on the human experience.

During my three-month immersion in Mezrab's storytelling nights, I listened to many storytellers from countries such as Iran, Turkey, South Africa, England and Syria—who altogether painted a vivid tapestry of Amsterdam's rich cultural diversity. Their narratives spanned a wide range of experiences, from childhood memories and parental reflections to transformative moments like coming out as queer, navigating gender transformation or overcoming mental health challenges.

Mezrab facilitates a live process of telling and creating the everyday life stories of Amsterdam, weaving a collective diary of urban life. Each story intersects with the past, present and future, contributing to the creation of a collective memory that captures the shared experiences and aspirations of the city's inhabitants. Recurring themes include the complexities of settling in Amsterdam, discovering one's place within the city and the shared experiences of orientation and belonging.

The emotional resonance of Mezrab's stories, which traverse feelings of shame, fear, love, joy, longing and hope, highlights its role as more than just a platform for storytelling. Mezrab is a vital space where individual narratives converge to address collective struggles, build community and shape a shared understanding of life in Amsterdam. Based on my preliminary participation and observations, I had a chance to observe emerging themes while Amsterdammers were relating to Mezrab, or becoming Mezrabians.

On Storytelling

Urban storytelling, the practice of sharing personal and collective narratives within urban spaces, plays a crucial role in fostering community cohesion, especially in diverse metropolitan contexts. Historically, oral traditions served as vital means of transmitting cultural knowledge and preserving social bonds within communities. In contemporary cities, this practice has evolved into various forms—such as oral histories, street art, digital storytelling and community workshops—each offering opportunities for

individuals to engage in dialogue across cultural and generational divides. These modern forms of storytelling facilitate a bridge between the past and the present, allowing cities to articulate their evolving identities while accommodating and celebrating cultural diversity.[2]

We can think of the role of storytelling in urban spaces, especially for migrants, in relation to three key theoretical approaches: social capital theory, cultural identity theory and place attachment theory. Each of these frameworks highlights how storytelling functions as a tool for fostering social connection, affirming cultural identity and creating emotional bonds with urban spaces. Cultural identity theory, as articulated by Hall, underscores the role of storytelling in helping individuals express and reaffirm their cultural identities, particularly in new and unfamiliar contexts.[3] For migrants especially, storytelling can be a powerful means of asserting their identities and negotiating their place within the new social landscape. At Mezrab, young migrants use storytelling to preserve aspects of their cultural heritage while simultaneously adapting these narratives to the context of their new home. This process enables them to reframe their experiences in a way that not only strengthens their sense of self but also contributes to a broader sense of belonging.

Storytelling is an embodied practice that takes place within specific physical and social contexts. Place attachment theory explores how emotional bonds are formed between individuals and specific locations.[4] Storytelling enhances these emotional connections by infusing urban spaces with personal meaning and shared experiences. As individuals narrate their experiences of migration, struggle and triumph, they create emotional links to the city and its diverse landscapes. The storytelling nights at Mezrab contribute to this process of emplacement by transforming the venue into more than just a physical space. Through the act of sharing personal narratives, participants infuse the space with meaning, creating an environment in which they feel "grounded" and connected to both their own stories and the stories of others. In this way, storytelling at Mezrab fosters a sense of place and belonging, allowing migrants to establish emotional connections to their new urban environment. Moreover, stories are told within a social framework, where the presence of an audience amplifies the process of community building and relationship formation.

2 Kenneth J. Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction* (Sage, 2009).

3 Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 222–37.

4 Maria C. Hidalgo and Bernando Hernández, "Place Attachment: Conceptual and Empirical Questions," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 21, no. 3 (2001), 273–81.

Social capital theory, as proposed by Putnam, emphasizes the role of networks and relationships in fostering social cohesion and trust within communities. Storytelling acts as a key tool in establishing these networks by creating shared experiences that bond individuals.[5] In spaces like Mezrab, storytelling facilitates the formation of "bridging social capital," wherein individuals from diverse social and cultural backgrounds form connections that transcend these divides. Through the exchange of personal narratives in a common space, participants may establish mutual trust and build support systems that empower them to navigate their new urban environments.[6] The collective process of storytelling within the Mezrab community, as I experienced it, cultivates a strong sense of social cohesion.

Belonging and Community Building

Storytelling at Mezrab can furthermore serve as a transformative tool for empowerment by providing people with a voice and a platform to articulate their personal journeys. Scholars such as Andrews et al. have emphasized the significance of narrative as a means of identity construction and agency, particularly for marginalized groups.[7] The act of narrating one's story, especially in a public and supportive environment, not only bolsters confidence but also fosters a sense of agency, allowing individuals to take ownership of their lived experiences. For migrants, storytelling becomes a medium to navigate complex emotions tied to displacement and resettlement. Sharing personal narratives validates their presence in the city and creates a psychological sense of emplacement, enabling them to feel "grounded" in their new surroundings.

This process of "emplacement," a term often used in human geography and urban studies, refers to the ways individuals establish a sense of belonging and rootedness in a specific place.[8] Mezrab's storytelling evenings facilitate such emplacement by providing a safe and inclusive space where migrants can share their stories and connect with others. Sharing personal narratives allows individuals to transcend linguistic and cultural barriers, fostering

5 Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon & Schuster, 2000).

6 Ibid.

7 Molly Andrews, Corinne Squire and Maria Tamboukou, eds, *Doing Narrative Research* (Sage, 2008).

8 David Seamon, ed., *Place Attachment: Advances in Theory, Methods, and Applications* (Routledge, 2014).

bonds across diverse backgrounds. As Massey argues, cities are dynamic sites of encounter where identities are continually negotiated and redefined.[9] Mezrab exemplifies this dynamic by enabling migrants to engage actively with the social and cultural fabric of Amsterdam.

Participants at Mezrab often describe the experience of storytelling as profoundly empowering. One attendee that I met there said that "sharing your story with a whole group of people you don't know, also from diverse backgrounds and cultures, makes you feel empowered." Another reflected, "The night I told my story, I felt like I had found my place in Amsterdam." These sentiments echo findings from storytelling research, which highlight the role of narrative in fostering psychological well-being, strengthening social ties and enabling individuals to assert their place in new or challenging contexts.[10] For these participants, thus, the storytelling evenings have been rare and meaningful opportunities to engage in dialogue with a supportive audience, bridging the gaps between personal identity and communal belonging.

Beyond the personal benefits for the storyteller, storytelling at Mezrab creates a ripple effect within the wider community. Listeners, drawn from equally diverse backgrounds, are invited to engage with perspectives different from their own, fostering empathy and reducing prejudice. According to Sandercock, storytelling in urban contexts serves as a bridge between cultures, enabling people to envision new forms of coexistence and mutual understanding.[11] Mezrab's multilingual and culturally diverse environment amplifies this potential, creating a space where storytelling not only integrates migrants into the city's social life but also enriches the broader community by cultivating a shared sense of belonging.

The theoretical framework of narrative agency and the socio-spatial dynamics of urban belonging are central to understanding Mezrab's impact. The concept of "third places," introduced by Oldenburg, is particularly relevant here.[12] Third places are informal gathering spots that facilitate social interaction and community building outside the home or workplace. Mezrab embodies the qualities of a third place, offering migrants and locals alike an accessible venue to share, listen and connect.

Storytelling at Mezrab bridges gaps between individuals by transmitting shared human experiences, creating what Lefebvre describes as "social

9 Doreen Massey, *For Space* (Sage, 2005).

10 Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences* (Sage, 2008).

11 Leonie Sandercock, *Cities for Sale: Community and the Changing Culture of Urban Development* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2003).

12 Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (Da Capo Press, 1999).

space"—a space that is not only physical but also shaped by interactions, emotions and relationships.[13] On stage, storytellers often share deeply personal and vulnerable moments, inviting the audience to connect on an emotional level. One storyteller reflected on their initial fears after migrating to Amsterdam: "Although I was in the city of lights, I was facing the reality that I was all alone, far from home." Another recounted the struggle of navigating Amsterdam's challenging housing market while dealing with financial instability. These narratives resonate with listeners, fostering empathy and creating a sense of shared understanding.

The interactive nature of Mezrab's storytelling events also contributes to the formation of community. Between sessions, hosts engage the audience by posing reflective questions related to the evening's theme. For example, during a night centred around "help," attendees were encouraged to ask each other, "When was the last time you helped someone?" and "When was the last time you asked for help?" While storytellers tell their struggles in relation to the theme of help, the audience also becomes part of the story by the prompts asked by the host. These prompts not only extend the themes of the stories into personal conversations but also transform the audience from passive listeners into active participants. This participatory element aligns with Sandercock's assertion that storytelling in urban contexts facilitates intercultural dialogue and helps build inclusive communities.[14] Despite Mezrab striving for inclusivity, some barriers to participation remain. Language barriers as all the programmes are held in English, for instance, can prevent locals as well as some earlier generation migrants from fully engaging in storytelling activities. Additionally, issues of representation may arise, as not all stories may reflect the diversity of the migrant experience. It is observed that former generations of migrants have not been participating.

Moreover, storytelling fosters what Putnam terms "bridging social capital," which refers to connections formed across social divides.[15] At Mezrab, people from diverse backgrounds—migrants, locals and visitors—find common ground through the act of sharing and listening. One regular attendee, Melike, twenty-six, described the atmosphere: "For some reason, whenever I had a chat with someone during breaks or at the end of the show, the conversations were always intimate and vulnerable. Even with people I had just met." This collective vulnerability is a hallmark of storytelling at Mezrab, as it invites participants to share aspects of their lives that are

13 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Blackwell, 1991).
14 Sandercock, *Cities for Sale*.
15 Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.

often hidden or silenced. This aligns with the work of Frank, who highlights storytelling's ability to foster mutual recognition and collective meaning making.[16] At Mezrab, the stories shared on stage become a shared cultural resource that connects individuals to one another and to the broader urban context of Amsterdam.

Conclusion

Mezrab is more than just a venue for storytelling—it is a space that reflects the diverse needs of Amsterdam's population. For migrants, it offers an opportunity to tell their stories, be seen and feel heard. The practice of storytelling creates a sense of belonging, helping individuals feel at home in a city that might otherwise feel alienating. Mezrab exemplifies how urban storytelling can contribute to social integration, cultural identity and community building in diverse urban spaces.

As I observed it, Mezrab provides a safe environment that feels like "home," serving as a refuge for those seeking solace in a rapidly evolving city. Beyond storytelling, it facilitates connections and fosters a sense of community, addressing key challenges of urban life such as loneliness, job seeking and finding accommodation. These needs resonate particularly with migrants, refugees, and others navigating the complexities of life in Amsterdam.

The case of Mezrab underscores the importance of creating spaces where storytelling can thrive. As cities continue to diversify, storytelling can serve as a vital tool for fostering social cohesion, bridging cultural divides and supporting the emotional and psychological well-being of migrants. Future research should explore how storytelling can be integrated into urban planning and policy to create more inclusive, connected cities.

Returning to my first visit to Mezrab, I was struck by how Emi's story immediately drew me in, immersing me in an experience unlike any I had encountered before. It was remarkable to feel so deeply moved by the story of someone I didn't know personally. This experience encapsulated the essence of Mezrab for me: a place where personal stories intertwine with collective experiences, fostering a sense of belonging, community and shared identity.

In conclusion, storytelling at Mezrab, as I experienced it, creates a unique form of community by combining spatial inclusivity, emotional vulnerability and active participation. As a "third place," Mezrab provides a physical and

16 Arthur W. Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology* (University of Chicago Press, 2010).

social space where individuals can engage in storytelling, build connections and experience a sense of belonging. As I see it, Mezrab not only facilitated interpersonal relationships by integrating narrative and space, but also contributes to the social fabric of Amsterdam, making it a powerful example of how storytelling can transform urban spaces into hubs of connection and community.

Bibliography

Andrews, Molly, Corinne Squire and Maria Tamboukou, eds. *Doing Narrative Research*. Sage, 2008.

Frank, Arthur W. *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology*. University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Gergen, Kenneth J. *An Invitation to Social Construction*. Sage, 2009.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." In *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, 222–37. Lawrence & Wishart, 1990.

Hidalgo, Maria C., and Bernando Hernández. "Place Attachment: Conceptual and Empirical Questions." *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 21, no. 3 (2001): 273–81.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Blackwell, 1991.

Massey, Doreen. *For Space*. Sage, 2005.

Oldenburg, Ray. *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*. Da Capo Press, 1999.

Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon & Schuster, 2000.

Riessman, Catherine Kohler. *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. Sage, 2008.

Sandercock, Leonie. *Cities for Sale: Community and the Changing Culture of Urban Development*. Continuum International Publishing Group, 2003.

Seamon, David, ed. *Place Attachment: Advances in Theory, Methods, and Applications*. Routledge, 2014.

About the Author

Ceren Gülbudak, a PhD graduate in sociology from Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, specializes in urban sociology, exploring diverse urban experiences through storytelling and placemaking. She is an executive member of Ort-Schafft Material in Berlin and affiliated with Plot Twist Placemaking in Amsterdam.

18. Amsterdam through a (Trans)national Gaze: A Conversation with Life Writing Author Alejandra Ortiz

María Auxiliadora Castillo Soto

Abstract: Alejandra Ortiz, author of *De waarheid zal me bevrijden*, offers readers an opportunity to see Amsterdam from her (trans)national gaze. Through this piece, she shares how Amsterdam has influenced her identity as a woman, writer and activist, and her feelings of (non) belonging. At a young age, Ortiz travelled to the north looking for the safe environment that her hometown did not provide. In 2015, she resettled in the Netherlands as an asylum seeker. Unfortunately, she encountered a severe bureaucratic system that denied her that opportunity. Despite these difficulties, Ortiz has built a support system for herself and those around her facing similar situations. She continues to share her story with the hope of fostering a more understanding society.

Keywords: belonging; intersectionality; asylum narratives; queer migration; autobiographical activism; identity formation

Alejandra Ortiz is the author of the book *De waarheid zal me bevrijden* published in 2022.[1] In this autobiography, Ortiz provides the reader with a first-hand experience of what being a trans migrant woman entails. She recounts her life story in Mexico, the United States and the Netherlands, where she currently lives.[2] Ortiz has become a voice for migrant, refugee and trans people, as well as other groups who face similar situations. In

1 The title can be translated into English as *The Truth Will Set Me Free*.

2 At the time when this piece was written, Ortiz has not been granted asylum yet.

Rensen, Marleen, Leonieke Vermeer, Laura van Hasselt and Ernestine Hoegen, eds. *Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity: Urban Lives*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2025.
DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-18

the book's concluding remarks, Ortiz expresses how she "wanted to make a time document of the 'refugee crisis,' the tumultuous period for Europe, from the perspective of a non-European."[3] Ortiz decidedly raises her voice to denounce unfair procedures that asylum seekers undergo, while also includes an intersectional analysis of gender, religion and race.

I invited Ortiz to talk about Amsterdam and the places in the city that have a special meaning for her. I met with her on a beautiful spring day in Amsterdam Central in May 2024. She had a clear plan of the places she wanted us to visit, so we started our adventure.[4] Ortiz is a great conversationalist who shares her captivating and heartbreaking stories with an innate eloquence. Walking through the city of Amsterdam with her was a delight, and I will forever be grateful to her for this gift. We visited places where life slows down and hides from tourists. Places that came alive as she spoke, and that are now assembled here through photographs and her story.[5] This creative piece intends to take the reader through Amsterdam Noord, Floradorp, De Pijp neighbourhood, Oosterpark, and Boost Amsterdam.[6] Additionally, we took the IJ ferry and visited Amstel Station, recurring places in Ortiz's book.

I use the term "(trans)national" with a double intention. First, to highlight Ortiz's transnational gaze related to what Paul Jay refers to as "authors who have themselves experienced the kind of displacement and mobility characteristic of twentieth- and twenty-first-century life under decolonization, globalization, and the proliferation of struggles related to nationalism around the globe."[7] And second, to feature a life story narrative from a trans woman's perspective, considering that the "trans" in transnationalism may be connected to "transgressive sexual identities."[8] It is my hope that readers view these places through Ortiz's (trans)national gaze and question and rethink their own sociocultural location.

3 Alejandra Ortiz, *De waarheid zal me bevrijden*, trans. Simone Peek (Lebowski Publishers, 2022), 413. Translated into English by the author of this chapter.

4 The places and the photographs are organized as we visited them during our walk around Amsterdam. The photographs and audios were collected by the researcher on 21 May 2024.

5 There were no specific questions. At each place, I recorded Ortiz's short monologues in Spanish, explaining why these places are meaningful to her. Her words were translated into English and edited by the researcher.

6 Please visit www.boostamsterdam.nl for more information about this organization.

7 Paul Jay, *Transnational Literature: The Basics* (Taylor & Francis, 2021), 52.

8 Elisabeth Herrmann, Carrie Smith-Prei and Stuart Taberner, "Introduction: Contemporary German-Language Literature and Transnationalism," in *Transnationalism in Contemporary German-Language Literature*, ed. Elisabeth Herrmann, Carrie Smith-Prei and Stuart Taberner (Camden House, 2015), 8.

Fig. 18.1. Ortiz in a passageway in Amsterdam Noord.

Amsterdam Noord: Pandemic Times

Alejandra Ortiz (AO): "I remember this passageway because in 2020, during the pandemic, I was living in Amsterdam Noord. There was a time when the police were doing roadblocks, and people with no documentation, like me, could get in trouble. I was vigilant of always using the face mask and the bike's lights correctly, so they would not stop me. I used to see the police officers, and then I would take an alternate route, with the fear that the alternate route had roadblocks as well. This place has stayed with me because, although it is safe and it has been my home and I love it, it has not always made me feel safe."

Amsterdam Noord: A Place to Call Home

AO: "Amsterdam is my home. It is a city that has opened many doors to me. It has welcomed me and helped me grow as a person. In no other place, not in

Mexico, not in the United States, nor in any other place in the Netherlands, have I felt so safe and accepted as in Amsterdam. There is a type of magic in this city that makes people who are different, or any person because we are all different, feel like we are home. We feel as if we are part of this city and its community even if we were not born here. I feel welcomed and loved by Amsterdam and its people and its LGBT community."

"We started this journey in Amsterdam Noord because this place is less known. Not many people come here because you have to cross the water. It is a place which gave me the home that I did not have, and it offered me a peaceful feeling that I had not found anywhere else. Besides, it is full of parks and water, and the water relaxes me. Amsterdam Noord is not a touristic place, but it is very calm. Maybe that is why I love it."

Floradorp: A Room of One's Own

AO: "In the year 2020, during the pandemic, I was moving from one house to another because it was difficult to live with people or to find a place where I could feel comfortable. One day, a friend told me about an elderly person in the north of Amsterdam who was looking for someone to live with in exchange for cleaning the house and offering company. It was the first time I visited Amsterdam Noord, more specifically Floradorp. It is pretty because it is picturesque. The houses are baby blue and baby pink. When I lived here, with my own room and everything, it was the first time that year that I felt truly safe."

AO: "Honestly, to be in Amsterdam Noord provided me with another perspective because it is a very peaceful place. It was really comforting to listen to the birds. You can hear them throughout all of Holland, but in the centre of Amsterdam with so many people, tourists, and noise one rarely pays attention to them. To me, this area has pleasant memories of safety during a moment in which there was a lot of uncertainty."

After having shared some hours in the stillness of Amsterdam Noord, we embarked to Amsterdam Central on the IJ ferry, and from there we visited the other places on her list. We experienced the contrast between the crowded ferry and the residential area of Floradorp as people moved around with their bicycles, chatted with their companions, and played the guitar while singing to entertain the crowd. Even so, Ortiz shared how in this tumultuous space she has found the opportunity to bring her attention to the present moment and enjoy the beauty of Amsterdam from the water.

Fig. 18.2. The IJ-ferry.

The IJ Ferry: A Moment to Live in the Present

AO: "When I moved to Amsterdam Noord, I started using the ferry. I had seen it before, but I did not know that it is free. It was a nice surprise to know that I could use it as many times as I wanted to. I worked cleaning houses and taking care of children, so I had to cross the city every day. I was always hurrying. I rode my bicycle really fast from one place to another, trying to make it on time. But when I got on the ferry, even though I did not want to, I had to stop because I could not control the ferry's time. I used to write on my phone, or I took pictures of the landscape, which is so pretty from there. I admired the giant cruises, because they are a real spectacle, as well as the sunsets and sunrises. The ferry has always been an experience that forces me to be in the present. It also reminds me of the past and how much I needed a moment of calmness."

De Pijp: To Play, Write and Belong

AO: "At the beginning of 2019, I started working as a babysitter, taking care of French and Russian children. First, it was only one family, but later, I became so popular that I worked with six different families. It was a job that kept me busy, which I really enjoyed."

"Adults are very strange. We can be very cruel sometimes. On the contrary, children are very open. I think some of the children's parents, or all of them, knew that I am a trans woman, and sometimes they made strange comments. Other times, they did not say anything, but I felt that the children accepted me in a very natural way."

"Back then, I was writing my book *De waarheid zal me bevrijden*, and while the children played, I wrote notes or sent audio notes to myself. The time I took care of the children gave a different sense to my life in Amsterdam. A different tie from the one of being part of the trans, the migrant and the refugee communities. This place brings me nice memories. In fact, I do not have any negative memories of this playground."

Amstel Station: An Interlacing Hub

AO: "Out of all the train stations in the Netherlands, the Amstel Station is my favourite. The murals are beautiful. It brings me many memories; some are happy memories and others are very nostalgic. A lot of times I arrived in and left Amsterdam from this station. Many episodes in the stations that I mention in my book happened here. There were goodbyes, encounters, kisses, hugs and sad moments as well. Moments in which I thought that there was not going to be a better tomorrow, which there was, fortunately. I really like this station because it echoes many of my experiences in Amsterdam."

Boost Amsterdam: A Writing Haven

AO: "Boost is an organization where they teach various classes such as languages, computer skills, sports and others. Boost is also a place where, from Monday to Friday, people cook for the community. Everybody can come and eat with people from the city of Amsterdam and all over the world. I started coming to Boost in 2019 for my Dutch classes. After the pandemic, coming here was a moment of retirement and peace for me. They helped

Fig. 18.3. Amstel Station.

me a lot. For instance, when I was writing my book, they let me use their offices to write in peace."

AO: "I always felt welcomed here. No one ever disrespected me. I felt that they made me feel part of the community. Even though Boost does not self-proclaim as an LGBT-friendly place, everyone I know from the LGBT community feels safe here. There is a non-spoken agreement that they treat people who are different with the same respect as any other person. I am so grateful to the people at Boost for everything that they do for this beautiful project, and they deserve our support. They do it for people like me, who, at some point in their lives, may not have a place to go to during the day."

Oosterpark: A Peaceful Retreat

AO: "I have come to realize that Oosterpark is the most beautiful park in the city. It is well designed and there are several small spaces where you can come

and sit down and have a moment of peace. During some years, I lived in this part of Amsterdam. I used to walk by this park every day, unfortunately, not always taking the time to meditate and relax. In fact, I think that today is the third or fourth time that I sit here with the sole objective of relaxing, but it is a space where I have come with my friends, lovers, and with my Dutch teachers and classmates. For someone who is running from the noise and chaos of the city, here I can find, and I have found, a lot of peace."

Conclusion

Amsterdam is a city that hosts people who migrate for varied reasons with the hope of finding a new home, and Alejandra Ortiz is one of them. Although Ortiz mostly narrates her experience in Amsterdam as positive, it is important to also point out the difficulties that she has encountered. For Ortiz, to experience the pandemic in Amsterdam proved a difficult matter in terms of safety since she could have been deported. Furthermore, after nine years in the Netherlands, Ortiz has not received asylum status, which uncovers a faulty system that fails transgender people, mainly from Latin American countries. A report published by the Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau confirms that transgender people live in a precarious socio-economic position, with fewer assets, and are less likely to own a home and to be employed, and this precariousness might be aggravated if the person is a migrant or a refugee.[9]

Even so, Ortiz found in Amsterdam a place to safely be herself and a community that supports her, something that she could not find in Mexico or the United States. (Trans)national narratives, such as that of Ortiz, are important because they shape current modes of understanding society and provide alternative representations. We are in need of more migrant, refugee and trans people voices, as well as other minority groups to "create a lifeline" of untold stories, as Ortiz herself puts it.[10] To understand the city of Amsterdam from a (trans)national gaze is an opportunity to question our privilege and to bring up issues that directly affect transgender people who have migrated. I conclude this piece with an excerpt from Ortiz's book about Amsterdam:

9 Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, "LHBT Monitor 2022," 5 July 2022, 8, https://www.scp.nl/publicaties/publicaties/2022/07/05/lhbt-monitor–2022.

10 Winq, "Winnaar Winq Community Award 2023: Alejandra Ortiz," 10 May 2023. https://www.winq.nl/winnaar-winq-community-award–2023-alejandra-ortiz/103934.

For me, Amsterdam is truly "the city where anything is possible." The city presented itself to me as a blank canvas, where I could draw whatever I wanted. Here is where I found my voice. I became part of organizations like Trans United Europe, TNN and the TransScreen Film Festival. I founded Papaya Kuir, my own brainchild: an art collective for Latinx queer refugees in the Netherlands. [...] Amsterdam often makes me forget that I am undocumented. Mokum [a nickname for Amsterdam] makes me feel like I matter and that there are people who love me.[11]

Bibliography

Herrmann, Elisabeth, Carrie Smith-Prei and Stuart Taberner. "Introduction: Contemporary German-Language Literature and Transnationalism." In *Transnationalism in Contemporary German-Language Literature*, edited by Elisabeth Herrmann, Carrie Smith-Prei and Stuart Taberner, 1–16. Camden House, 2015.

Jay, Paul. *Transnational Literature: The Basics*. Taylor & Francis, 2021.

Opzij. "Deze tien boeken maken kans op de Opzij Literatuurprijs 2023." 5 July 2023. https://www.opzij.nl/2023/07/05/deze-tien-boeken-maken-kans-op-de-opzij-literatuurprijs-2023/.

Ortiz, Alejandra. *De waarheid zal me bevrijden*. Translated by Simone Peek. Lebowski Publishers, 2022.

Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau. "LHBT Monitor 2022." 5 July 2022. https://www.scp.nl/publicaties/publicaties/2022/07/05/lhbt-monitor-2022.

Winq. "Winnaar Winq Community Award 2023: Alejandra Ortiz." 10 May 2023, https://www.winq.nl/winnaar-winq-community-award-2023-alejandra-ortiz/103934.

About the Author

María Auxiliadora Castillo Soto is a PhD candidate at Utrecht University in the EUTERPE Project: European Literatures and Gender from a Transnational Perspective. She analyses how transnational life stories of women challenge the idea of Europe. This research is supported by the 101073012 EUTERPE HORIZON-MSCA-2021-DN-01 Project.

11 Ortiz, *De waarheid zal me bevrijden*, 406–407 [my translation].

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

19. Archives and Other Stories of the Self or the Importance of Being Earnest

Edy Seriese

Abstract: This highly personal column recounts the history of the self-decolonization of the archive of the Indisch Wetenschappelijk Instituut (IWI) as the formal start of a self-decolonized historiographic project. Academic filing methods led to the separation of the personal belongings stored in the archive from the fragmented, oral "tellings" (*vertelsels*)—everyday memories and anecdotes—of the *Indisch* community. The items were thereby stripped of their contextual meaning and colonial narratives were reinforced. Recognizing this, the IWI shifted to digitalization, reuniting objects with their stories and centering *Indisch* voices. In more recent years, the archive has been transformed into a living testament to shared history, challenging colonial historiography and affirming the right of *Indisch* people to narrate their own past.

Keywords: tellings; (self-)decolonization; archives; historiography; institutionalized colonialism

"Tellings," I call them, "*vertelsels*" in Dutch, all those shreds and shards, fractions and fragments, spontaneously remembered and often told sideways while talking about something completely different. They turned out to be the true building blocks of the life stories the Indisch Wetenschappelijk Instituut (Indisch Research Institute, IWI) was after in its extensive storytelling project called *Kumpulan* (meaning: coming together *Indisch* style) on the history of the *Indisch* culture in the Netherlands in 2001.

Tellings such as:
My sister-in-law, in the 1970s, last century. She was pregnant and already had a two-year-old called Child (not her real name of course). Child had

Rensen, Marleen, Leonieke Vermeer, Laura van Hasselt and Ernestine Hoegen, eds. *Amsterdam Diaries, Life Writing and Identity: Urban Lives*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2025.
DOI 10.4324/9781003690733-19

two toy animals, both with a beak yet very different. She had named them Duck and Alsoduck. The new baby arrived, and the proud parents sent a birth card saying: Child has a baby sister. Yesyesyes they did mention the newborn's name as well. But I'm a second child myself, I know how it feels: Child and Alsochild.

Or: my niece, ten years old in the mid-1970s, came home from school asking: "What kind of clothes did we wear in the Middle Ages, mummy?" She had to dress up for history class. So, I squeezed her into some smelly rags, explaining that she was an Amsterdam orphan ordered by J. P. Coen to sail to Batavia in Indonesia and marry an old fat VOC official. She refused to wear them, and she got her way. Because we don't have things called the Middle Ages in *Indisch* culture.

Or: mid-1980s my brother came home from history class, asking: "How was it, Daddy, to suppress people?" That question was ignored, *force majeure*: it felt like being squeezed into something smelly and ragged.

And a telling of myself, about my hobby: cooking. Not the "*rijsttafel*" (*Indisch* festive meal consisting of rice served with twelve to twenty side dishes) my mother had already taught me, but the "true" French kitchen, chocolate sauce on ice cream, for example. I always fail! No matter how carefully I used to stir my expensive exclusive chocolate bars, *au bain marie*, the very moment the chocolate touches the ice cream it pops back again into solid, now almost indigestible bars. Hopeless!

Luckily I found myself a true hobby: the IWI collection, the archive of *Indisch* culture. This culture, I must explain, has developed from 1488 in Asia in a transnational context under strong Portuguese, Dutch (Holland) and Indonesian influences. Due to the persistent and violent Dutch colonialism in Asia, in the 1950s over 350,000 of its people moved into diaspora. In 1960 they started to build an archive in The Hague with their own personal belongings: ten thousand books, over sixty thousand photos in albums, shoe boxes or envelopes, postcards, personal notes, letters, maps, passports, textiles, gramophone records, films, holidays souvenirs, not so much traditional diaries, but all testimonies of their daily life in Indië just as well. In the mid-1990s I volunteered to sort the archive, especially the items stored "in the attic." There were twenty more volunteers, some working there from its inception. However, I was in charge, being the most suitable for the job: second generation, *Indisch*-from-The-Hague and a professional documentalist. Enthusiastically, I started by following the approach I was taught at university: putting the items into categories like books, photos, documents, maps, museum items, audio; describing them in preconceived, academically proven terms. Items that didn't fit anywhere, not even after

squeezing, I put aside, not counting them, ignoring them, to be honest. I loved my hobby, the work, the volunteers. Particularly the ongoing stream of little stories they offered me while describing the items. Tellings about themselves, their lives in their homeland they call Indië, the country move. And about the archive. This is what they told me.

In the 1960s and 1970s personal belongings and their owners were the living source for *Tong Tong* (1958–76), a biweekly magazine led by the founding father of the *Indisch* culture in the Netherlands, the author Tjalie Robinson (1911–1974). This very atypical, Dutch-speaking writer had left Jakarta in 1954 for Amsterdam, looking for the soul of Western civilization while practicing his writer's method of wandering the streets chatting with everyone, and after three years he left that life for *Tong Tong*. Set up as a frame story like the *One Thousand and One Nights*, he envisioned his magazine as an everlasting storybook and thus a source for the imminent historiography on the former Dutch colony now called Indonesia. The magazine contained academic, journalistic and literary articles, peppered with all kinds of tellings: memories of *Indisch* people of their life in "Indië" and Indonesia. Implicitly presenting the experiential, intuitive knowledge stored in memories as equivalent to academically formed knowledge. "Tell the stories of your life yourself," Tjalie Robinson wrote to his readers, "otherwise, you don't exist." And so they did.

In the 1980s the collection was a library specialized in *Indisch* history, and as such an active member of a wider movement led by the Geschiedkundig Eerherstel Nederlands-Indië Committee. This committee, as its name signified, claimed "historical rehabilitation" for the former Dutch colony, taking to court, mind you, the Netherlands itself. The committee demanded grants and other guarantees to accomplish a new type of historiography on the Dutch East Indies, correcting the one realized by Dr Lou de Jong in 1984. By "new type" the prosecutors meant a history not written by one know-it-all with prejudices, as it so characterized the authoritative historian, but by interdisciplinary teams of academics, scholars, researchers and advisors with both academic and experiential knowledge on Indië. Not too common at the time.

In the 1990s the archive, now called the "IWI collection," was housed in The Hague, with a blooming garden, a working kitchen and an attic; rooms filled with bookshelves; photos, figurines, paintings and textiles everywhere; seats and sofas to relax or study. An *Indisch* house, equipped to receive guests: people from Indië bringing in their items, and people like me, part of an increasing stream of fact and fiction writers—researchers, novelists, journalists, students—consulting the archive. The IWI collection was famous for something the visitors called "*Indisch* hospitality," referring

to the staff members, the homemade snacks and drinks they served, and all these tellings of their own life they wrapped the archival items in. Charmed and amazed, visitors left with what *they* called typical items: a palm beach photo, a Japanese ID, taped gamelan music, a prison camp diary, items *we* thought atypical to the collection and the *Indisch* culture. They lent these collection items to use them in novels, expositions, films or articles about the former Dutch East Indies. About how warm it was and so far, how strange the natives and beautiful the sights, how hard the suffering in the Japanese camps and how boring life in the Netherlands was after returning. But in that context the items no longer referred to life in "Indië." Disconnected from their own context in the archive the items were freed from their accompanying tellings to be used in another type of stories, Dutch stories, constituting the underlying narrative of how colonization is done in practice. The former owners of the items, and other *Indisch* people with them, felt alienated from these items, squeezed as they were in this familiar though hostile context. And they stopped telling stories of themselves in public, refused to lend, let alone donate, their personal things to Dutch organizations. However, they did continue to collect items I would classify as "not fitting" by putting them away in the attic.

Only slowly I realized I had the postcolonial privilege to experience colonization in action. After all, these other stories, told from a colonial perspective, were all too familiar to *Indisch* people, even to me as a post-colonial child. Stories in which we are presented as silly talking creatures being poor and potential losers, sad individuals driven by their instincts, just causing problems—displaced in civilized society. That image existed in authoritative academic reports, novels, journalistic documentaries, and (therefore) also in all small talk about *Indisch* people. Preferably presented combined with archived documents, photos, diary quotes: sources seen in Western society as reliable and true. All together they "objectively" stated the official "truth" about *Indisch* people, constituting the main pillar of the Dutch colonial narrative, proven impossible to tear down. That narrative had been the very reason for *Indisch* people to build themselves an archive with their own belongings and memories. And earlier to respond to Tjalie Robinsons call to use *Tong Tong* to present themselves in memories, in *Indisch self*-images, against the ridiculous and harmful imposed colonial image. It was the very reason for him to actually publish these memories, no matter how poorly written, in forms common in Western magazines or in atypical form like jokes, wise remarks, ultra short stories, shreds of dreams, parts of a description, attempts to catch a sound, a smell, a feel in words, forms indeed in which remembrances appear and experiential

knowledge is stored. Practising *en passant* the basic human right to tell your own story yourself, only thirty years later formulated by Edward Said, but not recognized as such in the mid-1980s and counting in Dutch courts and society. These memories in Dutch, Indisch and Petjo had given the magazine its, in Dutch eyes, unfamiliar, unusual, unknown shape, that unintentionally alienated people who had never been in Indië but happily was recognized by people who had. They later had lured people towards the IWI collection. And now, I realized, the IWI volunteers, even though they had presented their self-images along with archive items, still experienced the power of the indigestible colonial image.

Then it struck me like lightning: Duck and Alsoduck. By categorizing I too had stripped the tellings from the items, facilitating the habit to use loose items in another context, repeating an old colonial act. I had squeezed this unique archive into an ever so unfitting shape, just the way I abused my delicate chocolate squeezing it in too cold a dish. Yes, it was the only archival form I knew, and academically supported, right? But was it the right one? Of course not. I was just another arrogant colonial know-it-all showing off my own academic knowledge. I had ignored the individuality, the goals and the dire need to collect this very archive, alienating the items from each other, from their historical context, from their rightful owners and the life stories that once gave them their meaning. Insulting the people who had gathered them, I had given those lifeless material things an inappropriate power. Now I experienced two things: how it feels to suppress people, *and* the importance of being earnest about it. I started to listen to the tellings again, to what the *storytellers* wanted to tell, and why, and how. Decolonizing myself, I was able to use the experiential knowledge as a source, refiguring the archive according to its original goal: putting *Indisch* people on the map as themselves.

Here's what the history of the IWI collection taught me: archives, like novels, as Edward Said pointed out, and historiographic stories as well, are invented, deployed and developed to serve colonialism, that one European project since 1488 to conquer the world. Therefore, involved social sciences and institutions on literature, historiography and education should decolonize *themselves* before reaching out for anyone else's story. Just like the Wereldmuseum Amsterdam did in the 1990s and again in 2023, asking: How does our colonial inheritance still shape us?[1] Genuine self-insight on the matter should be the prerequisite for academic archiving and research,

1 Wayne Modest and Wendeline Flores, *Our Colonial Inheritance: How Slavery and Colonialism Continue to Shape Our Present* (Lannoo, 2023).

historiography, or any presentation of other people and their former belongings, including their memories.

Then what happened? Well, all IWI volunteers took hold of modern technology to describe our items, store our tellings and restore our archive. Digitalization enabled us to reunite the items in their original context of family stories, and to describe them in words submitted by the people who once used these items. For words matter, no matter how unfinished the guide (http://amsterdam.wereldmuseum.nl). Our collection policy came to fruition in the new millennium with *Kumpulan*. In this project, material items and even life stories were no longer the focus. Instead, we used those to collect "tellings" in all shapes and sizes and sentences, no matter how poorly told. *Kumpulan* (2001–4) brought over 320 people together in larger or smaller groups. Just exchanging memories, they disclosed shared themes, familiar places, significant data and revealing insights. In 2003 we turned this project into a permanent item in the Dutch Open Air Museum in Arnhem, called "het Indisch Achtererf" (the Indisch Back Yard), giving Alsoduck a name of her own. There we receive our guests now. Hospitably, we *exchange* our ongoing "Tellings of the Self" with our visitors, using our photos, documents and diary quotes with exotic words and places to lure them into our perspective, collecting building blocks for future historiography by implication. In the years thereafter we gathered themes, dates and events from these tellings for *Aangespoeld* (Washed ashore). Over fifty life stories of extended families have been presented on the IWI website (http://www.iwi-nu.nl) since 2010, every dotted "i" and crossed "t" written in co-creation with the storytellers who lent their voice to bring their families to life. A new digital program connects individual lives with the IWI collection and if appropriate, with other lives too, by words, themes, events dates that the narrators delivered. Now a new self-evidence showed up: all presented people were not just individuals or just fellow sufferers in colonial times and recent wars. They formed a people, with a shared history going back to 1488 containing collective memories in language, music, dance, textiles, medicines, food, upbringing and more. An ongoing developing "culture inditude" as the sociologist Rob Vaillant called it in *Aangespoeld* (1950), referring to the self-named "*culture négritude*" of African-French colonial descendants. A culture developed through the ages, enabling its members to live their daily lives and even survive colonialism and other wars.

And now, since 2018, we are ready to collect a history of the *Indisch* culture in our current project *Piekirpedia*, a new *Indisch* word meaning hatching a new type of historiography. It would (digitally) write an extensive inclusive history, built with "tellings" and life stories, supported by all

relevant (academic) knowledge and ever-evolving (self-)reflections on lived experiences. The goal is far away, but clear: to overcome colonialism by recognizing how it has been institutionalized into "normal" behaviour, daily occurrences, and emotional impact. Or, summarized in questions an archive can handle: Which material and immaterial items can unhinge the canon, the frameworks and other stories that keep this bitter inheritance alive? Which tellings bring us insight into the matter? In which languages will we present them? All of this to build a new type of history: a frame story including everybody.

It's a work in progress, of course, requiring all the fellow-storytellers, fellow-writers and fellow-collectors within or without the archives we can get. I volunteered!

Bibliography

Modest, Wayne, and Wendeline Flores. *Our Colonial Inheritance: How Slavery and Colonialism Continue to Shape Our Present*. Lannoo, 2023.

About the Author

Edy Seriese is director of the Indisch Wetenschappelijk Instituut (Indies Research Institute, IWI), manager of its archive and project manager of SiC (Indies Cultural Foundation). She realized the *Tjalieclopedie*, a digital visual bio-/bibliography of author Jan Boon, also known as Tjalie Robinson and Vincent Mahieu.