[rplviz.swf]

Click image above to launch the correspondence visualization tool. For links to letters at Electronic Enlightenment, hold the SHIFT Key and drag your cursor over a vector.

Paper: Visualizing the Republic of Letters, 2009 [papers/Vis_RofL_2009]

Historians and other humanities scholars are increasingly seeking to develop and use visualization tools, methods, and theories for making sense of patterns in large sets of heterogeneous historical data with multiple dimensions. For example, the Electronic Enlightenment [http://e-enlightenment.org] database of over 55,000 letters and documents exchanged between 6,400 correspondents in the Republic of Letters presents a typical challenge confronting the emerging field of digital humanities. How can humanities scholars trained in close reading of individual documents make sense of patterns in large sets of data?

The new challenges posed by an exponentially growing corpus of online historical data also present an opportunity for collaborations with computer scientists interested in data visualization, interpretation, and human-computer interaction. Computer scientists are deeply interested in how users interact with visualization tools to explore, explain, and engage with data to create meaning. We engaged in an iterative, collaborative effort that brought together historians, computer scientists, and an academic technology specialist to design data visualizations to represent the intellectual network of the Republic of Letters.

The above visualization was developed in 2009 by Stanford Computer Science professor Jeff Heer's students, Yuankai Ge, Daniel Chang, Shiwei Song in collaboration with Mapping the Republic of Letters [http://republicofletters.stanford.edu] , Tooling Up for Digital Histories [http://www.stanford.edu/group /spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/project.php?id=1007] , and the Electronic Enlightenment Project [http://e-enlightenment.org] . We engaged in an iterative, collaborative effort that brought together historians, computer scientists, and an academic technology specialist to design data visualizations to represent the intellectual

network of the Republic of Letters. This mapping tool stands apart from the collection, providing a visual browsing tool with direct links to the digitized content in EE available to subscribers according to EEP's subscription rules. (SHIFT drag over lines to see links.) The visualization depicts connections between cities for over 55,000 letters and documents exchanged between 6,400 correspondents from the Electronic Enlightenment.

This visualization won the North American Cartographic Information Society [http://www.nacis.org/] 2009 Student Webmapping Competition prize in the interactive map category.