

Alex Soon Lee Tan

2009 NUS Hollywood Lab Intern at USC School of Cinematic Arts



Report (5th June 2009)

Alex Tan

The Labyrinth Project is an initiative that was set up in 1997 under the direction of cultural theorist Marsha Kinder. Many of the Labyrinth projects focuses on “database narratives”, which essentially follows a Deleuzian rhizomatic model, whose structure exposes the dual process of selection and combination of factual and contextual information, allowing the user to create personal narratives, which are unique to every individual.

The Labyrinth is currently working on a project entitled “Jewish Homegrown History”, which is an interactive project that includes an on-line exhibition and a travelling museum installation. The project attempts to trace the Jewish roots and history through a series of factual information and narratives that supplied by the public.

Right now, the Labyrinth team is in the progress of building up the factual database aspect of the project. Extensive research is being conducted, through the use of books, online information and interviews with prominent Jewish people in the various industries. My current role involves finding information pertaining to the project, in particular the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire of 1906. Building up the research database serves a two-way benefit, on one end enabling the database to be built up, while on the other end it allows me to ease into the team and better understand what the team is doing. Supplementary photographs were also retrieved from the USC online databases and public library archives.

A Conference followed by an interview with Dr. Orna Berry was scheduled on 4th June to discuss about her Jewish heritage and her role in the technological industry to the world. The Israeli Conference was held in Luxe Hotel at Sunset Boulevard, and its main objective is to bring Israeli companies together to increase business and investment opportunities between Israel and California with topics on high tech, clean tech, medical solutions, and entertainment media technology.

Dr Orna Berry is a former Chief Scientist of Israel and a venture partner in Gemini Israel Funds. In the interview, she discusses the Jewish role in technology and new media, and how the Jewish involvement in the world following the aftermath of World War II. The interview provides contextual narrative to the database, and allows social network to be expanded. Dr Berry also provided a list of names that might be helpful to the project.

Report (19th June 2009)

Alex Tan

The start of the second fortnight of the internship here under the NUS Hollywood Lab in Los Angeles began with a trip to San Diego to conduct an interview with Dr. Andrew Viterbi. The interview further expands on the current Labyrinth Project on the “Jewish Homegrown History” in California.

Dr Andrew James Viterbi was born in Italy to Jewish parents, and emigrated to the United States in 1939 to evade the horror of World War I. He got his degree in electrical engineering in MIT, and his Ph.D. in digital communications in USC. He invented the Viterbi Algorithm in 1967, currently used in the wide fields such as electronics, DNA analysis and networks. He is currently the president of the venture capital company *The Viterbi Group*.

Dr. Viterbi provided a series of accounts of his childhood and his Jewish roots. He explained the decision to migrate from Italy to the United States, why he chose to enter the field of engineering and the eventual invention of the Viterbi Algorithm. Dr. Viterbi also provided photographs and documents relating to his Jewish history and culture. Prior to the interview, I was taught how to set up the lighting and the camera, and manned the camera throughout the course of the interview.

For the subsequent days that follow, I am tasked to prepare for the travelling installation that is to begin in the Skirball Cultural Centre. In preparation for the installation, I have to generate a 3D model and to render it with a rendering software. A site visit was scheduled on the 16th of June to the Skirball Cultural Centre, but was sadly postponed as the liaison was down with a bout of flu.

Though the site visit has to be postponed, work has begun with the 3D modeling. Attached are some of the process pictures of the initial 3D renderings that were generated over the course of the week.

The team has since provided a set of feedback towards the initial set of renderings. Necessary changes has already begun to further improve the installation design.

Report (3rd July 2009)

Alex Tan

The changes that were made to the initial 3D model were done during the first week. A second set of renderings was done to visualize the spaces better. Human figures were photoshopped into the render files to provide a sense of scale and proportion as to how the space will be like.

On the 29th June, a site visit to the Skirball Cultural Center was made. We met up with Grace, who was in charge of the museum installation. Lighting issues and placement issues were discussed. The trip to the Skirball was a very fruitful trip as all of us managed to get a feel of how the gallery will be like and how lighting and layout issues can be tackled. Ideas were shared between the staff from the Skirball and the Labyrinth team. Some suggestions include shifting the screening area to the theatre, where official screening times were made, and the use of curtains.

On the 30th of June, an outdoor interview was scheduled with Dr. Bruce Phillips, a Jewish professor located here in Los Angeles. He tells the story of a Jew living in a Mexican neighborhood. His father owned a music store in Boyle Heights until the 1990s. He tells us the history of his parents, about how his father ran away at the age of 15 to join the Navy, before returning and settling in Boyle Heights. Throughout the years, the family has shifted twice, but the shop remained in Boyle Heights. Dr. Phillips also provided a walkthrough of the shop, which is now a general merchandise shop operated by a Chinese family.

Dr Phillips also provided home videos for the Labyrinth team to study and use. The Labyrinth is considering a home movie day, where several home videos will be screened to the public.

Report (17th July 2009)

Alex Tan

Following the site visit to the Skirball Cultural Center on the 29th of June, changes will have to be made to the current layout of the proposed installation to accommodate some of the facilities. This means that a new set of renders will have to be generated. On top of that, changes are also required for the proposed plan drawings.

Changes that were made with regards to the museum installation include having a partitioned wall to demarcate the screening space and the main installation space. To tackle the issue of sound, curtains were set up to absorb the sound. This allows the experience of the main installation space to be undisturbed by the sounds of the screenings in the adjacent room. Interactive kiosks were also reduced from 3 to 1, and touch screen panels were relocated to both sides of the entrance. One main problem

that we will have to tackle would be with regards to the interactivity with large groups. So far, the installation appears to focus mainly on the individual level, and lack the capability to engage large groups. A new plan drawing was drawn up with the necessary changes and accompanying text to further explain the layout and configuration of the spaces.

On the 18th of July, the Labyrinth will be hosting a home movie day in the University of Southern California, screening room 110. We hope that through the home movie day we are able to collect relevant home videos pertaining to the Jewish Homegrown History Project. This could greatly increase the projects database and research.

The team visited the screening room on Tuesday to discuss the logistics required for the home movie day. We discussed the registration procedures and layout of the place, assigned tasks and also decided on some operating procedures to facilitate more efficient movement.

Report (7th August 2009)

Ending Note

The Home Movie Day marks the final major event of the summer internship at the USC School of Cinematic Arts. It was a successful event, and the team managed to collect valuable home movies which could be used for the travelling installation that is opening come September 2010.

Following the home movie day, I was tasked with the updating of the labyrinth website, before I return home. Additional projects that were done from 2005 to 2009 were added, as well as the current project that the team is involved in - the Jewish Homegrown History project.

On the end note, I would like to thank NUS IDMI and Hollywood Lab for providing me with the opportunity to be exposed in the different fields of work outside of my focus in Architecture. As Vitruvius had once said:

"The work of an architect is an interdisciplinary field, drawing upon mathematics, science, art, technology, social sciences, politics and history, and often governed by the architect's personal approach or philosophy"

The three months that I've spent living in the States has exposed me to the various cultures and living. It has provided me with an intimate look on the urban planning and

development. Interviews with the various individuals have also provided a first hand account of life out of Asia. It has been a wonderful experience going on this program.

Once again, thanks to NUS IDMI, Hollywood Lab, and the Labyrinth Lab in USC for the opportunity!