

Government Houses and Virtual Realities

Using an array of theoretical perspectives on the nexus of knowledge and power (Foucault, Deleuze & Guattari, Bourdieu), Transcultural Anglophone Studies (TAS) has been exploring the material history of Empire on the basis of its recent collaboration with the German Institute for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI), both at Saarland U. The cutting-edge computer technology of XML3D as developed by DFKI seamlessly integrates interactive 3D content into HTML pages, without any plug-in having to be additionally installed. Hence, users can dynamically interact with website content as well as monitor and/or intervene in different simulations. This opens up fresh ways of visualizing topics in a website that is multi-modal in that it sutures texts, pictures, videos, and audio-data. Having tested this potential, I would like to suggest that Literary Habitats might stand to profit from an interdisciplinary approach like this one.

Very briefly, in the British Government Houses Project, my aim is to fill virtual models of these Houses (Calcutta, Singapore, Cape Town, Spanish Town, Sydney) with 'life'. By this is meant that users will be able to not only view the exteriors of these buildings in 360° horizontal and 180° vertical perspectives, but by hovering over any interactive object placed on the website, they can access as much of the archival information that we've gathered on this object (be it an architectonic detail or an artefact, e.g.). This information has been compiled from an array of sources, including autobiographical writing by any of the former incumbents of the Government House in question, correspondence both official and private, travel accounts, historical records, paintings and photographs, etc. In those cases where copyright restrictions apply, links to relevant websites are instead being supplied. In this manner it is possible to 'enter' the virtual models as one would the real-life

building, move around in it – and the grounds – and visit the most important interiors of the building, in the case of Calcutta, these are the Ballroom and the Throne Room.

All the Government Houses can be viewed – only on Google Chrome – under these urls:

<https://wss3d.cg.uni-saarland.de/projekte/wso/building4.xhtml>

<https://wss3d.cg.uni-saarland.de/projekte/wso/building5.xhtml>

<https://wss3d.cg.uni-saarland.de/projekte/govhouses/3.xhtml>

<https://wss3d.cg.uni-saarland.de/projekte/govhouses/2.xhtml>

<https://wss3d.cg.uni-saarland.de/projekte/govhouses/1.xhtml> [Calcutta, "Raj Bhavan"]

You'll furthermore find, when visiting GH Cal (here titled "Raj Bhavan"), that 2 interiors of this building have been modelled:

<https://wss3d.cg.uni-saarland.de/projekte/govhouses/1.xhtml>

This url It has menus for virtual models of a) "the throne room" and b) "the ballroom" – you just need to click on the menu buttons at the top of the page.

N.B. it is not yet possible to view the embedded information – as this is work-in-progress, and will go online only when fully completed.

I do hope that you can now form an impression of what the project is about – as this might be what Literary Habitats, too, could explore. Since the models and the information embedded in them are not hierarchically structured, it is possible to connect each and every node of information with another – rhizomatically – so that via these conjunctions, information that was hitherto only available on a one-dimensional level, given the need to structure print sources hierarchically – now is

neither restricted to individual print sources, nor to a hierarchy. The interactive connection between not only object and user but between the palette of information about an object and the interface between this palette and other ones in the model hence allows for any number of inferences to be drawn – for the first time – with regard to objects as well as topics that have so far had to be treated in (splendid) isolation.

Let's take the case of a Melbourne author as our starting point: by implementing the Gov. Houses project's strengths as just described, it is no problem at all to connect just any about any amount of information compiled about this author with every single node of information the website offers, whether it be on the social geography of Melbourne, e.g., or on any of the other authors being focused on. This rhizomatic approach allows for a 'mapping' / visualization of Melbourne-born/based authors in an entirely new way – while at the same time being connected, via linkages, with other related websites – thereby creating a virtual universe, if we like, of writers in both their isolation as well as (inter-) connectedness (not necessarily perceived thus by them) with others once/now active in the field of literary/cultural production. Among other topics, festivals, literary prizes, and the like can all be addressed as phenomena in their own right as well and being incorporated into the website with reference to the writers who have thus been singled out for public attention.