The prose of the world: the field speaks for itself

Kersenboom, S.C.

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The procession advances slowly. The courtesans... perform obscene dances; ... the drums, trumpets, and all sorts of musical instruments give forth their discordant sounds. ... Those who have nothing else to do shriek and shout. ... To form a proper idea of the terrible uproar and confusion that reigns among this crowd of demoniacs one must witness such a scene. As for myself, I never see a Hindu procession without being reminded of a picture of hell.

This gradual led to a ‘logic of practice’ that informed the perspective of an ‘eye witness’ by inviting the user to simulate the possibilities of interactive multimedia. They aim to simulate frames of reference that differ significantly from those that articulate. This type of ‘expertise’ is highly pragmatic: silent, linear prose of the world into a non-linear, multi-layered, associative adventure. If the user craves to explore the unknown, he can travel at random and at leisure into underlying layers of information, stories, songs, dances, iconographies and metaphysics stored under the objects that he encounters in the digital procession. This circumambulation is a celebration of conceptualisation, beckoning the viewer to experience for himself, and confront the real world.

Design: from ‘thick description’ to rich application

Participant observation is the key to the entire process of data collection, data analysis and their representation. Endless hours of participation in Hindu temple rituals preceded the actual filming of the event in Kanchipuram on Friday, 31 January 2003. Mutual sympathy, familiarity, and a natural competence to blend in with the proceedings were imperative for the presence of the camera and the process of filming the procession. Thomas Voorter was able to film its progression only after acquiring the necessary ‘tacit expertise’ of what and who make up the process and when, how and why the procession moves the way it does. Its itinerary, time and highlights empower Hindu devotion and had to be taken into account as keys to understanding it. The ‘terrible uproar’ heard by Dubois proved to be a very strategic use of musical instruments and sound effects such as fireworks and gun shotts. The sound file forms the flow chart of the linear journey. In this application, the ‘shrieks and shouts’ do not come as a surprise: they highlight the ultimate histrionics of the goddess in her cleansing, peaceful and sublime form, as she blesses her devotees after her long journey through the night. In real life, incorporation immediately follows.

Digital, interactive multimedia reset frames of reference that have marked academic literacy for over three centuries. Fieldwork, data collection, interaction and co-authorship of researcher and informant as well as the physical categories of time and space, sensory perception and the human body are central concerns in developing designs for interactive multimedia. Eye to Eye with Goddess Kamakshi invites an investigation into the various aspects of the inspiration that drives hundreds of Hindus every Friday to share her presence again and again. Its design is based on the cultural practices found in Hindu temples and their Sanskriti and Tamil normative manuals, offering a digital journey that branches out into an extensive database of verbal and printed discourse, of instrumental and vocal music, and of audio-visual recordings, iconography and material culture. This investigation and experimentation with multimedia representations as innovatory methods for qualitative research seeks a new coherence in scholarly argumentation and communication: a prose of the world – a digital language that speaks for itself.

References


Thomas Voorter
Department of Theatre Studies
University of Amsterdam