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Chapter 1

Multimodal Studies

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Multimodal Studies

The phenomenon of multimodality has, as Jewitt (2009: 3) observes, generated interest “across many disciplines...against the backdrop of considerable social change”. Contemporary societies are grappling with the social implications of the rapid increase in sophistication and range of multimodal practices, particularly within interactive digital media, so that the study of multimodality also becomes essential within an increasing range of practical domains. As a result of this increasing interest in multimodality, scholars, teachers and practitioners are on the one hand uncovering many different issues arising from its study, such as those of theory and methodology, while also exploring multimodality within an increasing range of domains, for example, corporate advertising, cartoons, museums etc (e.g. Bednarek & Martin, 2010; Jewitt, 2009; Ventola & Moya, 2009).

Such an increase in interest in multimodality heralds the emergence of a distinct field of study within which a diverse range of scholars and practitioners converge to discuss phenomena and issues specific to multimodal study. Yet at the present state, as Jewitt suggests (2009: 2), “[m]ultimodality, it could be argued, strictly speaking, refers to a field of application rather than a theory”. Kress (2009: 54) similarly observes that “multimodality *as such* is not a theory even though it is often used as if it were. The term maps a domain of enquiry” [italics added]. Nevertheless, it is a field that requires the (Jewitt 2009: 2) “ongoing development of theories that account for the multimodal”. Thus, as Jewitt argues (2009: 12), “multimodality can be understood as a theory, a perspective or a field of enquiry or a methodological application.”

While the term multimodality as such does ‘map a domain of enquiry’ (Kress 2009), we would like to draw an important distinction here between studies which investigate multimodal phenomena (i.e. domains of enquiry), and multimodal studies as a field of expertise, distinct from linguistics or any other field of expertise. The reason for this distinction is that the study of multimodal phenomena, from whatever disciplinary or theoretical perspective, inevitably raises issues which have relevance to the study of multimodal phenomena in general (e.g. modeling semiotic resources other than language, inter-semiosis and the integration of semiotic resources); while proposals for solutions to such issues have relevance and application to any particular study of multimodality. In this sense, although there can be no (single) theory of

multimodality, certainly there can, should be and indeed are already emerging theories and descriptions of and methodologies for studying multimodal phenomena (semiotic resources, modes, and their interactions in multimodal discourse) - in the same way as there are theories (not a theory) of language within the field of linguistics.

Although most scholars working within this emerging field do come from other established disciplines (as identified in Kress 2009), with their own theoretical and descriptive orientations, styles and concerns, there has been a clear movement towards the development of generalizations applicable beyond the particular concerns of those studying within particular domains of reference or with particular academic backgrounds, and with application to the study of multimodal phenomena in general. Scholars such as O'Toole (1994), Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), O'Halloran (2005), Bateman (2008), Lemke (2009) and Baldry and Thibault (2006) have for quite some time devoted energy to developing theoretical, descriptive and methodological resources particularly adapted to and for the study of multimodality in general, and in facing issues arising from such developments. Jewitt's comprehensive (2009) volume is an exemplar of the diversity of interests and issues in and approaches to contemporary multimodal studies, and offers itself a persuasive argument that while there is no single theory of multimodality as such, there are certainly distinct theoretical concepts and frameworks emerging from the study of multimodality as a field. Martin's (2010: 1) contribution also is

explicitly “concerned with developing the general theoretical framework informing” research into the variety of semiotic resources used by humans to communicate meaning within that volume.

It is therefore in these two senses that we refer to the emergence of a distinct multimodal studies field: as both the mapping of a domain of enquiry, and as a site for the development of theories, descriptions and methodologies specific to and adapted for the study of multimodality (although potentially applicable, at certain levels of generality, to other distinct fields of study, including linguistics). In the first sense, multimodal studies applies existing generalisations (of theory, description, methodology) to the exploration of specific multimodal phenomena, sets of texts or contexts in order to cast new light on those domains. Such domains might be more broadly defined areas of multimodality; e.g. ‘language of displayed art’ (O’Toole, 1994), ‘grammar of visual design’ (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), ‘speech, music, sound’ (van Leeuwen, 1999), ‘mathematics discourse’ (O’Halloran, 2005); particular (sets of) semiotic resources in interaction; e.g. images and text (e.g. Martinec, 2005; Unsworth & Cleirigh, 2009) and gesture and phonology (e.g. Zappavigna, Cleirigh, Dwyer, & Martin, 2010); or sites where multimodal discourse is at issue, such as classroom discourse (e.g. Clarke, 2001; Jewitt, 2006), and interactive digital media such as games, the internet, video and corporate advertising etc (e.g. Jewitt, 2009; Ventola & Moya, 2009). In the second sense multimodal studies such as those listed above use texts or types of text to explore, illustrate, problematise, or apply general issues in multimodal studies,

such as those arising from the development of theoretical frameworks specific to the study of multimodal phenomena, or methodological issues (including challenges in transcription, analysis and representation within publications).

In any particular work, of course, one may always find a complementarity of attention, to the specifics of a particular corpus or area of research, practice or teaching, and to the more general issues that inevitably arise when considering particular domains of research. Both O'Toole's (1994) and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) pioneering works, while extending the study of 'language' and 'grammar' into new domains, were also clearly foundation texts exploring issues of theory and methodology of general significance to multimodal studies. This categorization is therefore perhaps better seen as a continuum, the two different orientations – focus on general theoretical and methodological issues, or on specific domains of study - representing poles along which individual works range in terms of their major concerns. This approach acknowledges that most if not all studies, no matter how focused on an issue of general relevance or a specific domain of application, contribute both to the development of our understanding of multimodality in general as well as to the application of that understanding to the study of specific domains of multimodality.

The main point to be made here is that the specific demands of multimodal phenomena motivate ways of approaching, conceptualising or *doing* multimodal studies different from those which have been standard practice

within the study of language or other monomodal semiotic phenomena. Such considerations appear relevant if we are to begin considering multimodal studies as a field, not only of application but also as the site of emerging theories, descriptions and methodologies.

Exploring Issues in and Domains of Multimodal Studies

In this volume our aim is to present new explorations within the emerging field of multimodal studies by bringing together fourteen chapters which both discuss issues arising from the study of multimodality and explore the scope of this emerging field within specific domains of multimodal phenomena. The chapters in this volume are thus organized into these two broad categories according to the main focus within each: either on exploring general issues arising from multimodal studies; or on extending multimodal studies into or focusing on specific domains of multimodality.

However, as discussed in the previous section, there is always a complementarity of attention within any work on multimodality, to the specifics of a particular corpus or area of research, practice or teaching, and to the more general issues that inevitably arise when exploring these domains. Generalities tend towards obscurity or irrelevance if developed without reference to the specifics of actual discourse; while insights we obtain into specific texts or types of texts remain trivial or barren, or are indeed

impossible, if uninformed by the consideration of more general perspectives on theory and methodology. We wish therefore to present the various studies in this volume as representing a dialectic between the exploration of issues of general significance to multimodal studies and the exploration of specific domains of multimodality; while however also acknowledging that some works do tend towards one or other of these main areas of focus.

We propose therefore, following our observations in the previous section, to present this categorization as a continuum, the two different orientations – focus on general issues, or on specific domains of study - representing poles of a cline, along which individual works range in terms of their major concerns. The aim of this approach is to characterize the works in terms of their main focuses, while at the same time highlighting the productiveness of this complementarity of focus both within individual chapters and across the volume as a whole.

The terms 'issues' and 'domains' are used here in a very general sense, in the present volume. Firstly, issues may be those such as theoretical framework, the comparison of or application of different theoretical or analytical approaches and ways to account for the integration of different semiotic modes. Thus Bateman's Chapter 2 is concerned with the theory of semiotic modes, with the aim of developing a definition of a semiotic mode that is supports the identification of more fine-grained semiotic modes than has

hitherto been the case, and which thus has greater applicability and responsiveness to the needs of multimodal texts. Drawing on social semiotic approaches to multimodality, but also upon work within other fields such as cognitive science, computer science and film studies, the chapter begins by problematising the tendency within multimodal studies towards the application of a-priori assumptions with respect to this important aspect of multimodal theory: in particular the assumptions that such categorizations are self-evident and/or aligned with sensory modalities (visual, auditory modalities etc). Although very much focused on theory in his discussion, Bateman demonstrates through consideration of empirical analysis how such a characterization of semiotic modes can be of assistance in analytical tasks.

Feng is also clearly focused on theoretical issues in Chapter 3, exploring a cognitivist perspective on aspects of social semiotic theory: in particular, the construction and viewer interpretation of spatial orientations and page layout, and the construction of persuasive ideology through such resources. The comparison and calibration of different theoretical perspectives is however firmly grounded in the analysis of a corpus of 100 static visual car advertisements from newspapers, magazines and the internet. Smith in Chapter 4 also considers the consequences of taking different approaches to the study of multimodal phenomena, exploring bottom-up (anatomistic) and top-down (functional) approaches to intonation description. He shows how two different theoretical approaches to the study of intonation can yield

different results in terms of analysis and in terms of what gets analysed, and argues that each approach thus has its own affordances and constraints in terms of its capacity for making statements of meaning about semiotic phenomena. He then explores the interpretative consequences of speech being 'turned into' writing and then subsequently turned back into speech, and the implications of this potential variation for literate cultures in general; and concludes with some observations of relevance to theories and the practice of multimodal studies.

Berry and Wyse discuss issues arising from the design of tangible interfaces for music composition in Chapter 5, in particular the relations of the abstract and material planes in music and in computational interfaces. The discussion combines perspectives from the study of music, including discussions of the composition process, inspiration and execution with respect to instruments in their relations to and representations of musical abstraction, from computing, in particular the development of graphical user interfaces, and also from Piaget's observations of child development of formal thinking through concrete operations. They observe that tangible interfaces generally offer advantages in terms of their physical accessibility and nature, features that are of benefit to adults as well as children, but are limited in what they can offer in terms of the large scale abstractions which motivate and constitute a significant aspect of music composition.

Maier explores a particular domain, that of marketing discourse, in Chapter 6, specifically the multimodal communication of knowledge within eco-business contexts. However, the aim is “to identify how the meaning-making potentials of language and images are integrated, and how this multimodal integration influences the persuasive communication of knowledge types”, with a “central focus on the model of analysis”. Maier explores the issue of interdependencies between different semiotic modes, with the verbal and visual modes of discourse being shown to subvert rather than complement one another, thereby identifying an important change in advertising discourse from persuasion to presenting eco-friendly credentials. The chapter also orientates to practitioners by offering practical recommendations for those engaged in producing marketing discourse with respect to discrepancies between what such discourse is ostensibly aiming to convey and what it actually (multimodally) communicates.

Goebel draws upon ethnomethodology, linguistic anthropology and studies of embodied interaction to present an exploration of the concept of ‘enregisterment’ in Chapter 7, the final chapter in the ‘Issues’ section of the volume. Via the analysis of an episode taken from a corpus of shows from an Indonesian television serial, Goebel explores how multimodal signs become emblems of identity leading to the formation of a ‘semiotic register’, by which interactants orient to one another with respect to characteristic signs of their personhood. Goebel teases out the distinctive affordances of the televisual

medium within this genre for representing personhood in relation to ethnicity and social relations, and discusses how the persistence of particular semiotic encounters over time, across a variety of multimodal signs such as facial expressions, gestures, prosodies and the like, creates an emergent semiotic register which then forms the context for interpretation of such emblematic signs. The chapter thus contains important suggestions towards the theory and analysis of multimodal signs, particularly the integrative analysis of multiple signs within multimodal communicative acts.

Domains of multimodal phenomena may be defined in a variety of ways. In Chapter 8, Van Leeuwen is concerned with an argument for and suggestions towards the study of a new domain which is considered to be underdeveloped, urging a new 'semiotics of decoration'. But for van Leeuwen, this domain of application is very abstractly identified, 'decoration' representing here a particular philosophical approach to design within different modes, materials and eras - in dress, architecture, Powerpoint, language, music, typography etc in the 19th and 20th centuries - which is contrasted with the bare functionalism of the Bauhaus and other similar approaches to design. Van Leeuwen shows that, as semioticians, we thus need attend to meaning-making activities beyond those traditionally thought of or attended to as such. His approach to extending and thus defining the domain of multimodal studies is a crucial feature of the chapter, one which has consequences for the way in which the emerging field of multimodal studies might develop. Not for the first time, van

Leeuwen may have created here a whole sub-field for and approach to multimodal semiotics.

Like van Leeuwen, Eisenlauer, although interested in a particular domain, 'personal publishing texts', in fact explores a broader domain of study in Chapter 9: social networking as a category, distinct from the old and new media through which such social action has historically been mediated. Eisenlauer applies a diachronic perspective on a new media form, Web 2.0 social network sites, with the aim of showing the continuities and also the differences between new and old forms of media (again, similar to van Leeuwen who explores decoration across different modes and media and thus shows the semiotic continuities between them), basing the discussion also upon the analysis of an interesting and valuable corpus of data: examples of the German Posiealbum or 'poetry album', a site for social networking since the mid 16th century, persisting into the 20th century primarily amongst school pupils. Eisenlauer relates the analysis of higher-level social contexts and communicative structures to their expression in lower-level media resources, thus modelling a useful approach to multimodal analysis.

The focus in Lim, Nekmat and Nahar's Chapter 10 is on new media literacy, broadening the study of new media to address a range of issues with respect to the changing demands made of consumers of contemporary media and multimodal communication. The critical link is made between consumption

and production, their integration within an understanding of the new media landscape; and the need for a multimodally-literate media consumer is identified, a range of key literacies discussed, and continuities observed between the critical literacies of contemporary and traditional media practices, and also contemporary refinements of these literacies. While the authors point to the changing responsibilities of producers and consumers of new media, with a greater pressure on consumers' critical media literacy, greater transparency on the part of media producers is nevertheless also urged.

Jewitt has a similar focus on multimodal literacy in Chapter 11, specifically the consequences for pedagogic practice within UK schools of the use of interactive digital technology – the interactive whiteboard (IWB) – this as part of a more general focus on 'School English through a multimodal lens'. A key perspective is the diachronic one: the changes since year 2000 in the technological and landscape of typical UK classrooms and the use of various multimodal resources and practices. However, pointing to the relations of multimodal communicative practices and competencies and the evolving critical social contexts within which such practices occur, Jewitt poses several questions regarding the types of modes available and their uses, the changing positions of teachers and students in the classroom, and the kinds of texts entering and being produced in the English classroom, questions which will resonate beyond this particular domain of study. A general theme for multimodal studies articulated here is that changes in technologies and

modalities do not come with their own immanent meanings, uses and significances but are conditioned and constructed within the wider contexts of prevailing and emerging social practices and conventions.

Ventola's Chapter 12 explores the domain of home styling. Her choice of text upon which the analysis and discussion are based – her own home, before and after a professional home 'makeover' - allows her to foreground different approaches to the semioticisation of home living space, in particular the differing ways in which inhabitants and professional home decorators interpret and design the same living space within the context/s of the discourses and functions of/within those spaces, as interpreted through the lens of social semiotic theory and description. Ventola points to the professional separation of, for example, architecture and building, and these with understandings of how people inhabit and construe their living spaces and conduct their semiotic social activities within them, advocating a holistic approach that takes into account all of these aspects, both in terms of multimodal studies and its application to interior design tasks.

Wignell's specific domain of interest in Chapter 13 is children's picture books, presenting an ontogenetic study of the changes that occur to the relationships between images and written text in picture books for children of increasing ages. The discussion is based on large-scale and detailed small-scale analytical treatments of a large corpus of picture books: sorted into a continuum according to amount of written text and relative prominence of

images and writing, and then mapped onto age groups; with a detailed metafunctional analysis following of a sample of texts from each category. The findings show that the amounts and relations of image and text change over increasing age groups, with the study revealing a shift from foregrounding of the interpersonal metafunction in books for younger infants to a less interpersonal prominence in books for older children (an increasing focus on ideational and textual aspect of literate discourse), corresponding with other changes along the same timeline. Wignell identifies other key tendencies in the move along the ontogenetic timeline, for example, the move from a tendency for words to depend on images to the reverse, where images depend on the words for interpretation - that is, representing an apprenticeship into reading written text.

In Chapter 14 O'Toole presents a diachronic study of the popular satirical cartoon television series, 'South Park' from its pre-digital to digital phases of production. O'Toole shows how the semiotic affordances available to and exploited by the producers have changed over time and the consequences of this multimodal evolution: what has and hasn't changed in the multimodal discourse and ideology of the series. A hallmark of O'Toole's pioneering application of systemic functional theory to the analysis of visual art is his emphasis on enjoying works of art, and on attending closely to actual texts as the basis of developing descriptive, methodological and theoretical generalizations, making his work, and the issues it raises, clearly presented

and very accessible. O'Toole importantly identifies the difficulties inherent in presenting a discussion of an audiovisual text where much of the discussion relies upon some form of annotated representation of the audiovisual (multimodal) aspects of the text under examination. His detailed textual annotations thus form the main basis for the discussion, allowing the reader to reference the aspects of the source text of essence to the analysis and argument.

The basic principle for the categorisation of chapters into the two sections above is, 'does the study and its conclusions orientate more to the study of multimodality in general or to the study of a specific domain of multimodality?'. Yet, as discussed, the various chapters can be thought of as being arrayed along a continuum in terms of focus, rather than simply belonging to a category. Bateman's Chapter 2 and O'Toole's Chapter 14 are thus construed as standing the 'closest' to each of the 'poles' of this cline. While Bateman's chapter does draw on empirical analysis from specific domains (but from secondary texts), and O'Toole's chapter clearly raises issues of significance to multimodal studies in general, in both these chapters there is a clear case for categorization within the sections within which we have located them: Bateman's focus is on the theoretical apparatus of multimodal study (towards a finer differentiation of semiotic mode), O'Toole is very much orientated towards discussing a particular set of texts (in terms of

changes in their deployment of particular semiotic resources - stop-motion and digital forms of animation).

However, other chapters, in particular those 'in the middle' of this continuum, do not fit so neatly into this categorical distinction. For example, van Leeuwen's 'the semiotics of decoration' in Chapter 8 has a distinct focus on a particular domain of application of social semiotic theory, yet this domain is defined very abstractly (i.e. 'decoration' across different types of text, semiotic modes and eras), and so lends itself to generalizations of genuine significance to multimodal studies: for example, modeling an approach to multimodal classification and description that operates across modes and media. Likewise, Goebel uses texts within a specific domain (an Indonesian television series) in Chapter 7, but he is in fact concerned with the general issue of enregisterment through multimodal signs. Hence, by making the principle of organization that of location along a continuum rather than a categorical classification, we aim to draw attention both to the complementarity of focus within all the chapters, and to the degree to which any individual chapter, in our estimation, can be located within one or the other category.

Such a characterisation of works – as being ranged along a continuum rather than separated into discrete categorisations – seems appropriate to this emerging field of study, in which the concept of parametric gradience as an

appropriate form of description has been so important (cf for example van Leeuwen 1999, 2009), challenging traditional linguistic notions of sets of categorical distinctions. However, the concept of a cline of differentiation may also in fact be related to Halliday's (1992) deployment of the concept of a 'cline' in relating systemic potential and actual choice in text, the 'cline of instantiation', and also to other work on the modeling of linguistic theory in terms of gradience (e.g. Pike 1959) and indeterminacy, in particular topological as contrasted with typological systems (eg Lemke 1999; Martin and Matthiessen 1991). While such an approach has several important applications within linguistics, it is clearly particularly relevant to the study of parametric systems so characteristic of multimodal semiotic resources.

Multimodal Studies as an Emerging Field

As can be seen in many other contemporary publications dealing with multimodality, the diversity that seems inherent in multimodal studies can be related to the range of resources humans have developed for communication and the many sites and social contexts in which multimodal communication is found, so that there is potentially a large range of disciplinary, theoretical and practical traditions implicated in the study of multimodality. For example, although there are in this volume, as in many other works within the multimodal studies field, several authors working from within the perspectives afforded by systemic functional theory and social semiotics (both of which

related traditions have been at the forefront of contemporary work on multimodality), the different issues and domains addressed represent a variety of viewpoints and concerns, in terms of disciplinary origin, theoretical approach, methodology and domain of research. Many of the chapters presented in this volume reflect in some way this diversity of approach or focus, according to the backgrounds and concerns of the authors, and several chapters specifically deal with the application of multi-disciplinary or multi-theoretical perspectives, although of course usually from the standpoint of one established tradition.

The diversity of works dealing with multimodality is perhaps one of the reasons why there has been something of a reluctance to classify multimodal studies as an academic discipline, with its own distinct theories etc. Issues of access to the multimodal signal, methodological issues in terms of analytical resources and techniques, theoretical challenges, as well as the institutional landscape also, have all no doubt contributed to the difficulties of construing and enacting a distinct multimodal studies discipline, alongside the study of language, media, psychology, etc. The study of dynamic video has only been practically feasible within recent decades; and these and more contemporary interactive digital media present many problems to the multimodal analyst and publisher that are yet to be solved, including the immense complexities and difficulties of analyzing and relating multiple semiotic resources within multimodal discourse. As yet most working within this field are,

institutionally, allied within other disciplines; and although funding is increasing for multimodal studies, this is distributed in general across those existing disciplines rather than being for multimodal study as such.

Yet part of the challenge of developing a field of multimodal studies may be confronting the problem of characterizing and finding ways to classify the broad range of contemporary work dealing with multimodality: that is, identifying and categorizing the challenges, concerns and scope of works belonging to such a field. The range of scholars bringing new areas and perspectives to the study of multimodal phenomena means that such a discipline cannot simply be classified according to dominant theoretical orientations or disciplinary origins of those working within the field, nor according to domain of interest. In the present volume we present one way of thinking about multimodal studies, in terms of the focuses and complementarities within specific works and across the field in general. We thus wish to present the works within this single volume as a discourse within a shared space, of different issues, approaches and concerns, between a variety of scholars and practitioners interested in multimodal study.

The wealth of new work from an increasingly wide variety of disciplinary and theoretical positions, and the challenges being faced, makes the development of a field of multimodal studies increasingly important. Increasing interest in developing and applying theories and descriptions of multimodal discourse

and its phenomena suggest that scholars are taking stock and considering what such a field might look like, what makes multimodal theories distinctive from, what makes them alike to theories of language or other monomodal domains of study. The ways in which we study multimodality should and no doubt will reflect in some way and be appropriate to the nature of the phenomena we study. The range of publications in recent years dealing with issues in and domains of multimodal studies suggests that such a process is well and truly underway. Multimodal studies will thus inevitably develop its own distinctive flavours, its own styles as well as theories and methodologies. We think of the contributions within this volume as part of an ongoing collaborative effort which addresses and finds solutions to the vexing problems confronted in contemporary academia and social practice by the increasing proliferation of multimodal texts and their manifold semiotic and material complexities and challenges.

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