REVIEW ARTICLE

Multimodal Discourse Analysis: Media, modes and technologies

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PHILIP LEVINE and RON SCOLLON (eds.). *Discourse & Technology*: *Multimodal Discourse Analysis.* Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press. 2004. 240 pp. Pb (1589011015) $49.95.

SIGRID NORRIS. *Analyzing Multimodal Interaction: A Methodological Framework*. New York and London: Routledge. 2004. 177 pp. Pb (041532856X) £18.99.

KAY L. O'HALLORAN (ed.). *Multimodal Discourse Analysis*. London and New York: Continuum. 2004. 252 pp. Hb (0826472567) £75.00.

The commonalities among the fields of (especially, *critical*) discourse analysis and multimodality – such as the interest in the motivation of speaker or sign-maker – are obvious on even the most cursory engagement with both fields (cf. Iedema 2003). Predictably, the marriage of the terms 'multimodality' and 'discourse', within the four years since the publication of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) *Multimodal Discourse*, has become established within the discourse analytic and social semiotic communities. The recent appearance of the three books on review serves to further reify the bonds that exist between the fields of Discourse Analysis and Social Semiotics, the latter of which, having evolved from Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and extended by the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), is arguably the parent discipline of multimodality as a contemporary analytic concern.

In that same four-year span, very few books have, at least explicitly and centrally, focussed on multimodality as a key concern. Some have tackled related issues: for example, Scollon and Scollon's (2003) *Discourses in Place: Language in the Material World* considered the material, 'worldliness' of contemporary communication (what they term *geosemiotics*) as manifested in various face-to-face interactions such as coffee shop encounters, essentially fusing the study of non-verbal communication with a social-semiotic orientation grounded for the most part in Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) *Reading Images*. There has,

however, been much postgraduate activity concerned with multimodality, and many theses completed which remain (as yet) unpublished. But in the sense that prominent academic publications guide and orient the field from and for which they are produced far more influentially than doctoral theses do, the publication of the three books on review can be seen as heralding a new phase in multimodal research and ushering in a new generation of researchers. They can also be seen as the culmination of the wide variety of research that has been undertaken since the publication of Kress and Van Leeuwen's *Multimodal Discourse*. It is in this capacity – as a public forum for diverse and often competing theoretical notions – that the three books can be considered valuable extensions of, and contributions to, the academic field of multimodality.

TWO APPROACHES

The books – two edited volumes, one monograph – are in large part the results of the work of either current doctoral candidates or recent graduates. As such, they can be seen as the research of the 'first generation' of *students* committed to further exploring territory already opened up by the most prominent advocates of 'multimodal discourse analysis' (MDA): Van Leeuwen, Kress, Lemke, Thibault, Scollon, Baldry, O'Halloran, and so on. Represented in these papers are two approaches to multimodality that appear to be most prevalent currently. One approach remains faithful to the origins of multimodality in SFL, and to its 'systemic' goals. This approach is well represented in O'Halloran's volume, the research within it practically loyal to 'the tradition of systemic-functional theory' (p. 5). The other approach is less bound to the systemic origins of multimodality and appears to derive its motivation, initially, from a critical inclination towards mediated representations of (often current/topical) discourses of interest. As such, it is closer in methodological orientation to both Discourse Analysis (DA) and, its younger, tougher sibling *Critical* Discourse Analysis. This approach often deploys the same or similar analytic tools that can be found in SFL-oriented research, but utilises them mainly as a means for examining the 'truth effects' (Chouliaraki in LeVine and Scollon: 155) of the representation under scrutiny. In Chouliaraki's words, and in direct relation to television as a semiotic site:

> Multimodality provides a discourse analytic point of entry into the procedures by which televisual texts articulate language and visuality, orality, and writing; and the procedures by which meaning is inseparably inscribed onto these distinct media: verbal/aural, visual/pictorial, visual/graphic. (p. 154)

In short, the SFL-inspired work begins with an interest in the generation and development of multimodal systemic theory (whether it be of print media, film, music and so on), whereas the work that is continued in the spirit of DA begins with an 'object' of analysis, and deploys and constructs analytic categories concerning multimodal semiosis that are intended to illuminate some aspect(s) of the object under scrutiny. These approaches are not in contest. Rather, they

complement each other since, most obviously, each aims towards the same broad objective of studying the phenomenon of multi-semiotic meaning making; and, perhaps less obviously, it is particularly useful to have active in an academic community, at any one moment, both those researchers whose strengths lie in the development of analytic frameworks and tools, and those whose critical investigations benefit from the use of those tools. Furthermore, each methodological orientation can lead to results that are 'fed back' into the discipline which it is closer allied to. So, for instance, the chapters which constitute O'Halloran's edited volume contribute as much in the way of theoretical insight and development towards Hallidayan SFL theory as they do towards the general project of multimodality.

In this review article, I want to focus on the overlap between the two approaches – that is, on the conceptual agreement between both the DA and SFL traditions in multimodal analysis, and that *within* each approach. I therefore treat the books under review here as instances of the issues that I identify in the work on multimodality in general. The concepts crucial to multimodality, from both DA and SFL perspectives, can be summarised as: medium and mode. Even though these same terms are often deployed in a range of work, the concepts they refer to are understood differently. Terms such as these are, of course, operationalised individually in the methodologies of the various works, rendering it a mistake to take the relevant authors to task for their particular, idiosyncratic treatment of key concepts (as long as their *particular* uses of those concepts are made explicit and kept consistent). That said, I believe that it would be a serious error to simply brush aside the deeper implications of the various and competing deployments of some key concepts (as I see them). Identifying and questioning the sometimes very subtle differences between the uses of these concepts that form the foundation upon which the research *and findings* (interpretations) proceed can help us to understand the research agendas of the individuals involved, and thus to situate historically and critically evaluate the multimodal research agenda as a whole. The possible terminological and conceptual differences are often noted but they are almost always treated as a peripheral issue – commonly as a literal footnote. Moreover, terminological and conceptual agreement between the above-mentioned complementary approaches to multimodality would further aid their complementarity or their 'working relationship'. The aim here is to address these terminological issues directly.

In what follows, I provide a brief outline of the content of the three books, then move onto the more detailed discussion. I conclude with some related issues concerning the field of MDA.

CONTENT OVERVIEW

LeVine and Scollon's *Discourse and Technology: Multimodal Discourse Analysis* offers a selection of papers presented at the fifty-third Georgetown University Round Table 2002 conference (GURT). The explicit aim of the volume (and

conference) is to explore the relationship of discourse and technology within the domain of multimodality. This relationship is twofold, and the book divides its interest between the role of technology in (multimodal) discourse analytic research and the impact of communication technologies on meaning making. The impact of online communication practices and technologies on DA research is a prevalent issue in this volume, more so than that of other technologies. Other themes include (as stated in LeVine and Scollon's introduction): the study of social (inter)actions as a multimodal event, taken up with great skill by Sigrid Norris, Ingrid de Saint-Georges, Elisa Everts and Alexandra Johnson; the utility of multimodal discourse analysis in workplace settings, covered by Whalen et al; and in 'educational social interactions', discussed in depth by Rodney Jones, Angela Goddard, Elaine Yakura, and Boyd Davis and Peyton Mason.

O'Halloran's volume entitled, *Multimodal Discourse Analysis: Systemic-Functional Perspectives*, as the subtitle suggests, is far more specific in its methodological orientation than *Discourse and Technology*. The chapters that constitute this collection have much the same motivation and aims in common: that is, both to extend the areas of interest, the 'sites of analysis', that SFL-informed multimodal analysis covers; and to extend the theory itself. While these are not necessarily separate concerns, there does appear to be a definite tendency in the chapters in this volume to pursue either one or the other aim.

A methodologically consistent selection of chapters are included here, perhaps not surprising given that the majority of them are authored by O'Halloran's own doctoral students. The book is divided into three sections which represent three sites of study: 'Three-dimensional objects in space', 'Electronic media and film', and 'Print media'. The two most significant contributions the book makes are in those chapters that deal with 'methods' (broadly speaking) for researching multimodal phenomena, and those that are concerned with the interaction between two or more semiotic modes (termed 'intersemiosis' for the most part). Anthony Baldry's and Kay O'Halloran's chapters come under the first category; and both are concerned with computer-based techniques for analysing film and television product. Specifically, Baldry is concerned with expounding a methodological model for multimodal concordancing, and outlining the utility of a software tool he and others haven developed – the Multimodal Corpus Authoring system (MCA); and O'Halloran explores the use of Adobe Premiere 6 for the multimodal analysis of film. O'Halloran's chapter also comes under the second category in that it aims to explore the ways in which the different semiotic modes deployed are integrated and configured in Roman Polanski's film, *Chinatown*. Other works of note in this category include Victor Lim Fei's chapter, in which intersemiosis is discussed in terms of 'reinforcement' of meaning between two or more modes; and Pang's discussion on intersemiosis in museum displays. Also worth a mention is the inclusion of Michael O'Toole's chapter, in which he

deploys a SFL-inspired model of architectural meaning to the Sydney Opera House.

Finally, Sigrid Norris' monograph *Analyzing Multimodal Interaction: A Methodological Framework* differs from the other two books in terms of function. Aside from its status as a monograph, and not an anthology, this book is essentially Norris' doctoral thesis reworked for publication as a textbook. In its transmutation from thesis to textbook, a few thesis-like aspects have survived, though these might also be considered usual textbook content. For one, Norris lingers at length on a few issues of method: the first undertaking is the definition, delimitation and operationalisation of concepts and terminology deployed. The second is a comprehensive survey and outline of transcription issues in multimodal interaction analysis. What is valuable here is not only the pedagogic aspect of this undertaking, but what it reveals about Norris' world view in her own research and in others'. Speculations on what survived from Norris' thesis aside, the book also fulfils expectations about what a textbook should strive to accomplish. To this end, each chapter includes at least one 'assignment': bounded boxes of text that serve to define key concepts; and a chapter summary.

Upon first encounter, Norris's project seems remarkably similar to that of the 'non-verbal communication' schools, prevalent in the 70s and 80s particularly in the field of anthropology. And, indeed, Norris's work is closely allied with that body of ideas, and draws extensively on its literature; for example, the section on Gesture (in Chapter 2, 'Communicative modes') extensively deploys concepts of Kendon and McNeill. Yet it differs drastically from conventional non-verbal approaches to interaction because of its explicit *social semiotic* orientation (especially Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996). Norris's project, in short, is to theorise the multimodality at play in everyday human-human interactions.

MEDIA AND MODES: FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS IN MULTIMODALITY

In this section I will explore the various uses, across the many chapters of the three books under discussion, of two key concepts: *medium* and *mode*. As mentioned above, this discussion is not intended to serve as an impassioned call for terminological consistency. Rather, it is to identify the divergences among the books and their chapters of their varied deployments of (what I believe to be) fundamental concepts.

Modes and modeness[1]

A frequent concern in criticism of work in multimodality is the reification of the term and concept of 'mode', and of 'communicative modes' themselves. That criticism would be justified to small degree in a review of the three works,

for the 'modeness' of the modes that are deployed as analytic objects is sometimes taken as given in the chapters on review. For example, in the introduction to *Discourse and Technology*, soon after discussing the usage of 'mode' as a term and concept, Scollon and LeVine state that '[a] monomodal concept of discourse is distorting' (p. 3). On a first reading, this statement seems true enough. Yet it also invites the question: is a multimodal concept of discourse *not* distorting? Surely we should not so unreservedly comprehend a multimodal view as any more 'true' or correct than a monomodal one? If we do make such a judgment, then it follows that we are also seeing modes (or 'modality') as things that are 'out there', that can either be captured or missed by a given theoretical and analytical lens. Instead, it would be more appropriate to consider a multimodal perspective as an analytic construct built to enable those analysts that are so inclined to explore a wider range of phenomena than just the linguistic and verbal semiotic systems. And, so it follows, it would also be more appropriate to see the variety of identified semiotic modes as heuristically-defined analytic constructs.

Among the authors who do *not* adopt the view that modes are easily distinguishable and discrete meaning-making units is Norris, who actually takes a firm stance *against* that view. For Norris, the apparent reification of modes is the result of a *lack* of attention to the very concept of 'mode': once researchers attend directly and explicitly to the concept, it is likely they would concede that 'mode', by definition, is a heuristic concept, an analytic tool, and merely a way of seeing the functioning of a 'text' in terms of components. Another example of a reflective view on modeness in the work under review is Angela Goddard's chapter in *Discourse and Technology*, in which she problematises the distinctions among certain terms, such as 'speech' and 'writing'; 'spoken' and 'written'; 'oral' and 'literate'. These, for Goddard, are anything but unproblematic distinctions, especially in the context of internet 'chat' systems. She writes:

> One of the problems with using speech and writing as apparently transparent categories is that, historically, there have been many changes in how notions of speech and writing have been viewed, resulting in a complex picture. (p. 36)

To exemplify this point, Goddard challenges Crystal's (2001) outline of the distinctions between speech and writing:

> Speech is typically time-bound, spontaneous, face-to-face, socially interactive, loosely structured, immediately revisable, and prosodically rich. Writing is typically space-bound, contrived, visually decontextualised, factually communicative, elaborately structured, repeatedly revisable, and graphically rich. (Crystal 2001: 28)

This, for Goddard, is true only of particular genres of speech and writing. Invoking Tannen (1982), she argues that 'contrasts such as factuality and interactivity are very much predicated on using casual conversation as the prototype for speech and essayist literacy as the prototype for writing' (p. 36).

The actual use of language of *interactive written discourse* (the 'internet chat system' prototype) subverts this distinction. To put this in context, Goddard's (for me, welcome) problematising of the 'transparency' of, and distinction between, the categories 'speech' and 'writing' is pertinent to the assumed definability of any semiotic mode, in the three books under review and elsewhere, in the sense that there is a historical basis to all semiotic systems, and the boundedness of any system (as mode) does not escape this dimension.

Although, as Goddard argues, language as both writing and speech is extremely difficult to define absolutely, this difficulty has not precluded the widespread deployment of the term as a concrete and easily defined concept, in both lay and professional contexts. Furthermore, it is possible that this prevalent, 'naturalised' view of the assumed boundedness of language (as speech/writing) has contributed to how we understand other semiotic modes, since it seems that we have tended to apply this boundedness unproblematically to other communicative means such as sound, image, gesture, and so on.

Further contributing to the conception of non-linguistic modes as bounded is the application of analytic concepts originally developed in the context of linguistic research (and proved 'successful' in that context) to non-linguistic modes of meaning making. Perhaps the most obvious example would be Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) and van Leeuwen's (1999) exporting of the concept of 'modality' (as relating to the representation of 'truth' and 'reality') from Hallidayan functional grammar into the semiotic systems of image and of sound, respectively. But the application of linguistic concepts to non-linguistic and non-verbal semiotic modes, as Bateman et al. (2002: 4) have argued, has occurred without the same 'empirical basis' that could be found in linguistic analyses. Theories tested against data in one field (linguistics) do not permit the wholesale transfer of the theory to other fields (image, sound, etc.). Bateman et al. (2002: 4) call the analyses and theories of visual semiotics (in particular, Kress and van Leeuwen 1996) examples of impressionistic or 'interpretive analyses': analytic and explanatory procedures whose claims perhaps *cannot* be supported. They continue:

> The analytic procedures for establishing to what extent [the analytic principle of Given and New] could be a reliable property of layout rather than an occasionally plausible account are unclear. Nevertheless, following on the initial presentation of the analytic scheme in van Leeuwen and Kress (1995), it has been presented again in Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 1998) and is now itself being adopted as unproblematic, or 'given', in some systemically-based research on multimodality (see, for example, Royce (1998), Martin (2002)). (Bateman et al. 2002: 6)

It is precisely this 'givenness' of the foundation of, say, contemporary visual semiotics that contributes to the objectifying view of modes in other proposed semiotic systems. As Victor Lim Fei notes in O'Halloran's *Multimodal Discourse Analysis*:

> While the direct adoption of a linguistic theory for other semiotic resources has been criticised (for example, Saint-Martin, 1990), Sonesson (1993: 343) cautions that 'the

outright rejection of the linguistics model must be at least naïve, and as epistemologically unsound as its unqualified acceptance'. As such, a delicate balance between the adoption of and rejection of linguistics theories to visual analysis and intersemiotic processes must be maintained. (p. 221)

Modeness, as van Leeuwen (1999) in his work on the semiotics of sound and music, and Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) argue, derives from the evolution of media according to the socio-cultural interest in using a particular medium to perform, fulfil or enable a particular social function. This conception of modeness would entail that a mode is never absolutely defined or bounded, only in a state of constant evolution – a point that needs to be heeded by researchers at every level of their research. Sigrid Norris shares this view – and in fact, has the most considered and therefore convincing account of mode of the selection of work on review (though, in fairness to the other contributions, she has much more scope in which to explore these issues). In her words:

> Modes are unavoidably construed as distinct entities. [Yet] modes are not bounded units. A mode is a loose concept of a grouping of signs that have acquired meaning in our historical development. (p. 11)

This position would no doubt be shared elsewhere by Carey Jewitt, but it remains implicit in her chapter in *D&T*. The explicit aim of her contribution is to 'untangle some of the complex connections' between the two concepts, media and mode, which have, as she argues, 'become woven together like two threads in a cloth' (p. 184). Jewitt makes her position clear up front: modes are means of *representing*, and media, means of *disseminating*. Yet, although Jewitt attempts to 'untangle some of the complex connections' (p. 184) between media and modes, she sometimes contributes to their conflation. For instance, in contrasting the media of book and CD-ROM, Jewitt argues that, in reading a book, 'the reader is given a clear reading path – from the top left corner of a page to the bottom right, and so on, from page one to the end' (p. 187) and suggests that this is a characteristic of 'the book' *as medium*. Yet, reading path is as determined equally by the *mode* of written language (in this case, written English), not only by the medium of book.

Elsewhere in the reviewed works, 'mode' is not always so explicitly and purposively defined. Its use in some of the contributors' chapters implies that those researchers think of a mode as more of a 'channel' of communication (for instance, Lim Fei's chapter in *Multimodal Discourse Analysis*) – therefore naturalising a mode's discreteness by its relation to a particular sense organ (the recognition of which in turn completes the circuit and creates the 'channel'). Most chapters in O'Halloran's volume bypass the issue of what a mode or a 'semiotic' actually is (if we follow the logic of many of the chapters' use of the term 'multisemiotic' instead of 'multimodal'). It might be unfair to take the writers to task for this, as the express purpose of those chapters is to further some other aspect of a systemic-functional theory of multimodal

semiosis. In this sense, the lack of philosophical orientation to these writers'
analytic practice is testament to the distinction made earlier in this review:
that each of the two approaches to multimodality has a different but comple-
mentary job to do. However, in contrasting the three books that represent the
two approaches, it would appear that what is usually seen as the more 'applied'
discipline – DA – is actually the more theoretically reflexive in this case, in
that discussions of mode and modeness figure in many of the chapters included
in those books. For most of the chapters in *Multimodal Discourse Analysis*,
modeness, or 'difference within the semiotic' as Chouliaraki calls it, is a fact of
semiosis, and is rarely opened up to question.

Media

As outlined above, Norris in *Analyzing Multimodal Interaction* and Kress and
van Leeuwen (2001) believe that a mode is an abstract resource for semiosis,
not a physical or material one. This definition is posited in contrast to that of
'media', which is defined by Kress and van Leeuwen as '[the] material
resources used in the production of meaningful products or communicative
events. "Media" can be both materials and tools (e.g. airwaves and radio)'
(Kress and van Leeuwen 2001: 21). In *Analyzing Multimodal Interaction*,
Norris calls for our conception of mode to remain open, yet the same needs to
be argued for the concept of 'media'. 'Media' certainly can be defined as the
material means with which meanings are made; but another dimension of
understanding is made possible by opening the concept up to other interpretations.
As Jonathan Sterne (2003) argues in his book *The Audible Past*, most studies
that engage in the process of mediation and its products are let down by a
rather murky and tangled conception of *medium*, which for him is

> a recurring set of contingent social relations and social practices, and contingency is
> the key here. As the larger fields of economic and cultural relations around a technology
> or technique extend, repeat and mutate, they become recognisable to users as a med-
> ium. A medium is therefore the social basis that allows a set of technologies to stand
> out as a unified thing with clearly defined functions. (Sterne 2003: 182)

For Sterne, then, a medium is, in Lukàcs' (1971) terms, a relationship between
people that has acquired a 'phantom objectivity', a certain 'thingness' (Sterne
1999: 504). It is not a physical or material basis with which meaning is made
and modes evolve – such as a technology or set of technologies. Rather, a given
medium – television, in Sterne's (1999) research – *stands for* the plethora of
relations between people, and the 'phantom objectivity' that those relations
attain imbues that relationship with 'an autonomy that seems so strictly
rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature:
the relation between people' (Lukács 1971: 83, quoted in Sterne 1999: 504).

   Nicholas Cook (1998), in *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, meditates in his last
chapter on the question: What is a medium? He finds value in a definition

offered by Jerrold Levinson, who denies that the term is 'equivalent to *material or physical dimensions*' (1984: 7; original emphasis). 'Rather', he continues, 'by a medium I mean a developed way of using given materials or dimensions, with certain entrenched properties, practices, and possibilities' (Levinson 1984: 7, quoted in Cook 1998: 262).

Almost all of the chapters included in the books on review, and certainly in Norris' monograph, see media as the physical stuff of communication. For instance, Jewitt (2004: 184), in *Discourse and Technology*, argues that 'media refers to *how* texts are disseminated' (p. 184, my emphasis), which would certainly be a sufficiently open definition to include not only the tools and technologies of dissemination, but its practices and infrastructure too. This would be in keeping with Sterne's and Levinson's notions of media quoted above. Yet in the remainder of the sentence, she gives the examples of 'printed book, CD-ROM, or computer application' (loc. cit). Jewitt is not wrong to use these examples, but she has missed an entire other dimension of media (and *mediation*) and let her definition perpetuate the notion that media are entirely physical means. In light of the complexity of the term 'mode' in the work on multimodality, this conception of media is hardly surprising, as any alternative definition to a physical/material one would likely overlap with the definition of mode. In fact, in Levinson's definition above, his treatment of medium appears more like the prevalent conception of 'mode'.

CONCLUSION

The common thread running through the three books is, of course, a multimodal perspective on meaning making. There are other commonalities but, essentially, the function of each book is different: Norris' *Analyzing Multimodal Interaction* fulfils a practical and pedagogical function, in that it aims to promote a methodological and analytic framework for understanding the multimodality at play in our real-time, face-to-face interactions, and deploys illustrations and post-chapter exercises to that end; O'Halloran's volume presents much recent work from a particular sub-discipline, keeping the reader up-to-date on the state of play in SFL/multimodality research; LeVine and Scollon's volume, a wide-ranging collection, intends to tackle two perspectives on the same phenomenon: the impact of technology on discourse, and the use of technology in DA-oriented multimodal research – thus neatly ushering the concept of technology into multimodal discourse analysis. On this basis it would seem that the books are only comparable in a very general sense. Yet, as three offerings made available at roughly the same time, they serve to define the field of MDA in its current status; to offer a 'birds-eye view' of this field; and to determine what presently counts as an interesting and relevant line of enquiry in MDA research.

Given the different function of each book, it is difficult to compare them in an evaluative sense, though the merits and shortfalls of each can be discussed.

I found the selection of topics and research styles in LeVine and Scollon's *Discourse and Technology* a little too broad to be cohesive, and a little too one-sided in its approach to the relationship of discourse and technology – but this is understandable given the origins of the book and, by extension, the selection of chapters included. That said, I would have liked to have seen more of the chapters cover the first perspective on discourse and technology: the impact of technology on meaning making. In terms of page count, *Discourse and Technology* gives more space to examining the place of technology in MDA research than technology's bearing on meaning making. When it does engage with the latter, it attends to the impact of *particular* kinds of technology (online 'communications technologies') on semiosis – a missed opportunity to explore the array of technologies in media production and reception, and, more fundamentally, the definition and delimitation of the term 'technology' itself, a subject which – alarmingly, given its title – is not raised in the volume. If we are to understand and theorise the relationship of technology and semiosis, a broader conception of technology is desirable here, as is the scope for the inclusion of media *production* as well as reception technologies. Understandably, a small percentage of the work included in the book attends to the impact of technology on semiosis directly (though, as mentioned above, many papers *do* focus on the place of technology in multimodal discourse analytic research). Furthermore, and more generally, the theme of the relation-ship of semiosis and technology should also encompass the notion of *constraint*; that is, how semiosis and the semiotic resources within a particular context of practice are shaped by (and shape) the concerns, methods and resources of the producer(s) in a specific setting. This notion includes a historical dimension, so that investigation of 'technological constraints' on a particular site of meaning making involves looking at the technological developments of a practice, and the coincident changes in the meaning-making possibilities of that site. While some papers included in *Discourse and Technology* (and indeed in the other works under review) do attend to this notion, most do not; and while the idea of constraint may not be at all relevant to many papers, to others it would contribute a welcome (in my opinion necessary) dimension of analysis. Meaning making, as Fairclough et al. (2001) noted recently,

> cannot be reduced to the play of differences among networks of signs [and] cannot be understood without identifying and exploring the extra-semiotic conditions that make semiosis possible and secure its effectivity. (Fairclough et al. 2001: 5)

On a positive note, the wide-range of methodologies, topics and analytic frameworks represented in *Discourse and Technology* is stimulating, and consequently gives a sense of the GURT conference from which the chapters originate.

In contrast to the broadness of *Discourse and Technology*, O'Halloran's *Multimodal Discourse Analysis* is perhaps a little too narrow in methodological

scope to be of extended interest to readers coming from outside the SFL sphere. Many of the analyses and frameworks are extremely technical, with little to help the SFL novice along the way. I admit that appeal to a wider readership than that already extant in the SFL field might not be the aim, but there are other clues that indicate that it is, at least, a partial aim: the title for instance, *Multimodal Discourse Analysis*, suggests a DA dimension to the common SFL approach to semiosis, and therefore a wider audience – not to mention how it might be 'shelved' in bookshops, actual or virtual (see below for further discussion on this point). That said, *Multimodal Discourse Analysis* is an outstanding volume that simply takes time to get acquainted – even, I imagine, for the DA-oriented researcher who has already deployed SFL and SFL-inspired theories (e.g. Kress and van Leeuwen 1996 would be a typical example) in their work. The level of technicality referred to above, though difficult, is also an asset to *Multimodal Discourse Analysis*: theories and frameworks are outlined in great depth and with a high level of skill. Without its technicality, perhaps, there would be little to commend this strand of research into multimodality, as connections with theories outside the SFL sphere are few. But there is much to commend in O'Halloran's book, particularly for the seasoned SFL-inspired researcher.

The under-representation of some modes of semiosis in *Multimodal Discourse Analysis* is my final criticism: most strikingly, *sound* – in film, TV, websites and in 'real' spaces such as museums and domestic settings. Although this lack is also true of the other books under review, it is *Multimodal DiscourseAnalysis* in particular that aims to represent new sites of semiotic analysis. Presently, in the area of the semiotics of sound design and music in multimodal contexts we have only van Leeuwen (1999), Iedema (2001), and my own work on sound in TV and film (Constantinou 2002, forthcoming). My call for sound to be explored in a critically engaged and systematic way should not indicate that I believe the study of sound, or audiovisuality, more important than other potential semiotic modes – smell, for instance – but rather it means that I believe sound to be as central to today's mass media as the visual, though greatly understudied. Sound and image constitute the hardcore of multimodal discourse, as hearing and sight are, what both John Cage and Bertrand Russell have called, the 'public senses': those most engaged by the mass media (Sterne 2003; Kahn 1988; Russell 1921).

Norris' *Analyzing Multimodal Interaction*, though a rigorous and rich exposition of a methodological framework, would benefit from some pages spent dealing with some fundamental issues concerning the proposed methodology. As mentioned above, the definition and command of the concept of 'mode' throughout *Analyzing Multimodal Interaction* is exemplary – Norris continually reiterates, where necessary, her point about the boundedness of modes – but her *general* epistemological stance is not questioned. It would be unfair to evaluate this book solely on this basis, given its pedagogical and practical function, yet it remains a bugbear of mine that reflexivity (in this

case, a researcher questioning her own epistemology) is not considered neces-
sary in a pedagogical sense. In this sense, it could be argued that *Analyzing
Multimodal Interaction* should also aim to be used to teach researchers, via
demonstration, how to construct their own frameworks, not only how to use
the present one. Without more information and elaboration regarding the
construction of Norris' methodological framework, the reader is left to assume
that – aside from the heuristic orientation to 'mode', and other concepts in
operation – Norris is ascribing her framework with a higher epistemological
status than could be justified.

To her credit, Norris's focus on *multimodality* is not made merely on
methodological grounds. Rather, she aligns her own project with the strongly
political aspects of multimodality (cf. Lemke 2002; Kress and Van Leeuwen
2001): that language, in both written and spoken forms, need not be considered
central in any explanation of human interaction, and that the plethora of other
communicative modes are always mobilised in every communicative and
material moment. It is this orientation to interaction that differentiates Norris's
work from the enormous body of research on non-verbal communication, in
which, for example, gesture, proxemics, smell, voice quality, and so on, are
considered *ancillary* modes of communication, with language as their master
(cf. the notion of *media primacy* in Cook 1998).

Also of merit here is Norris' explicit inclusion of *mind* and the role of *consciousness*
in interaction as part of the necessary theorisation of a multimodal interactional
framework. In doing so, she marks out sharply the difference between theorising
'real-time', 'transient' multimodal interaction and theorising multimodal represen-
tation in the ever-increasing variety of (mass-)mediated forms. Essentially, this is a
question of *materiality*: different communicative events have different materialities
associated with them, some enduring, like print media, others fleeting, such as live
music. What is at issue in her consideration of consciousness (absent from much of
the previous work on multimodality) is the intentionality behind the communica-
tive events of humans. In the more durable materialities such as those involved in
the production of prevalent media forms (e.g. television news programmes), it is lit-
tle wonder the human mind has not been considered necessary for inclusion in the
theory: we assume that in more durable forms of communication the very presence
of a particular communicative action is enough to regard it as intentional, i.e. the
result of a *conscious* prior decision. In stark contrast, in a spontaneous and
'unscripted' interaction – a coffee shop encounter, for instance – we need to know
which of the many gestures and other non-linguistic, non-verbal actions that we
witness in our observations are to be considered a part of a particular aspect of an
interaction, and which are to be considered 'marginal'. Only by appeal to the
human mind can this be achieved.

Finally, the book is extremely well-organised and the argument, for the most
part, clear and concise. Its application in the classroom would be simple to
implement, especially as a complement to other, more contemplative and
reflexive works on multimodality, such as *Multimodal Discourse* (Kress and Van

Leeuwen 2001). It deploys clear illustrations and exercises that are well thought out and relevant.

A final note on Discourse and Multimodality

As noted in the introduction, the marriage of multimodality and discourse analysis can be traced back to Kress and van Leeuwen's *Multimodal Discourse* (2001). The title of that book, however, suggests far more than even a surplus of theoretical connections. It situates the concerns of discourse analysis as inherently *multimodal* – which, of course, they are (cf. Lemke 1998 and various others). But it narrows the scope of multimodality, and invites the question: Are the concerns of multimodality necessarily oriented towards discourse, or to the interests of discourse analysis? While the book attempts to sketch out a comprehensive theory of multimodality, which includes 'discourse' as only one of four 'strata', it would seem that the title suggests a far more tapered perspective.

In fact, the original title of Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) was *Multimodality*. It was the publisher, Arnold, who recommended the book's title be changed – and narrowed in scope – from *Multimodality* to *Multimodal Discourse*[2]. 'Discourse' was then considered a marketable buzzword, and a sensible market to pursue, in that the conceptual term 'multimodality' would lack an anchor for otherwise prospective readers. Consequently, the book found its home among other discourse-oriented works, and its title suggests it is aimed at the DA community. It is without doubt that the title neatly 'packages' the content for a number of readers interested in the frontiers of discourse analysis, while simultaneously isolating a number of other, less *field-specific* readers who might otherwise be interested. Yet this is only a mild criticism of the way the academic publishing industry works. Of course, where there are funds to recoup, it can be expected that there are professionals whose task it is to reify (or perhaps *create*) academic markets. My intention here is not to reprimand those who facilitate the (non-electronic) distribution of original and interesting theory. Academic marketing is a necessary evil and the ins and outs of the marketing machine are not the issue here. What *is* at issue, however, is the impact such 'branding' might have on subsequent research and publication (cf. Bateman et al. 2002: 4).

Which leads me to the future of the field of MDA. At present, there is a large number of researchers who are pursuing what might be called 'traditional' or 'conventional' multimodal discourse analysis; that is, the study of multimodal texts (or the multimodal study of texts, to be more precise) from a social semiotic orientation to discourse and meaning making. Those who do pursue this line of inquiry will most likely derive their fundamental methodologies from Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2001). There are fewer researchers, however, concerned to widen their analytic and methodological lenses to include analysis of the extra-semiotic, constraining features of a production

or interactional environment. This strand is extremely important to pursue, and is recognised as such not only *outside* of the MDA field (e.g. Cottle 2003; Fairclough et al. 2001) but also within it (especially Iedema 2003; Bateman et al. 2003). Specifically, those interested in this pursuit should consider how the dynamics of various media production and interactional processes, and the practical and technological constraints of the media involved, play a part in establishing the parameters for meaning making. This does not indicate that I think what I have called above 'conventional' multimodal analysis is of less value than the proposed research strand. Rather, I believe it to be a complement to text-based analyses for the reason that, in Simon Cottle's (2003) words:

> When the analyst infers, as is often the case from a textual interpretation alone, the possible explanations, motivations or reasons that have informed their production, angels are often to be found dancing on a pinhead of textual analysis [. . .] If we want to understand why media representations assume the forms that they do [. . .] we cannot rely upon readings of media texts alone, no matter how analytically refined and methodologically sophisticated these may be. Studies of media organisation and production powerfully address the 'problem of inference' head-on by attending empirically to the often complex articulation of differing influences and constraints, both material and discursive, intended and unintended, structurally determined and culturally mediated, embedded within the moment of production – and which can be recovered by research. (Cottle 2003: 5)

NOTES

1. I use the term 'modeness' instead of 'modality' because the latter has been used, already confusingly, in two other senses. One is synonymous with 'mode'. The other concerns the representation of truth through multiple semiotic means (see Kress and van Leeuwen 1996 for discussion).
2. Van Leeuwen, personal communication.

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