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*Multimedia: Texts and Contexts* provides a cultural studies approach, primarily via textualist analysis, to existing media and the meanings produced through and with them. For Cranny-Francis the term multimedia is not to be understood as another name for digital or new media, but rather it takes on a similar conceptual task to that of the term ‘text’ in earlier permutations of discourse and semiotic analysis, to encompass almost all cultural forms of meaning-making. In Cranny-Francis’ words: “texts have long been multimedia, if not digitally multimedia. In other words, we have a tradition of texts and practices that involve different meaning systems working together to generate meanings” (166). This is not therefore so much a book about new media, but rather a critical redeployment of the term multimedia within the conceptual domain of a new semiotics.

Structurally, the chapters and conceptual framework are organised not in terms of the materiality of familiar media apparatuses (i.e. print, television, internet etc), but according to a number of identified multimedia ‘modalities’: writing, visuals, sound, movement, space, connection and synaesthesia. Each of these modalities is described with its own properties and effects, although there is usually more than one at work in any media instantiation. For this reviewer, of all the chapters ‘Sound’ and ‘Space’ were the most innovative and enlightening; the first providing a detailed analysis of the embodiment or sound, the ontological vulnerability of hearing, and emerging work in ‘soundscape studies’, while in ‘Space’ it is suggested that our grounded and corporeal rendering of spatial metaphors is partially what works to confound the virtual/real distinction in multimedia texts.

This modal analysis has advantages and disadvantages. It takes our attention away from our habitual understanding of media as separate entities, apparatuses or institutions, and focuses instead on the way meaning is *made* (not given or prescribed). That is, for Cranny-Francis (via Latour, Deleuze & Guattari, Haraway and Heidegger among others) any interpretation of meaning is always interactive, contextual, dynamic and embodied. Moreover, each particular instance of ‘multimedia’ can be interpreted across a number of modalities. This means that similarities and differences across media forms can be reconsidered, recalling Bolter and Grusin’s text *Remediation* which theorised the reciprocal effects between and permutations of ‘old’ and ‘new’ media (e.g. the use of traditional newspaper typeface and layout in web design). Throughout *Multimedia: Texts and Contexts* however there is a surprising lack of examples from both new media and mobile media (these latter surely catalysts of transformative practice in the ‘modes’ of Movement and Connection). Across all the modalities or chapters, most of the extended examples are of websites, museum exhibitions, and popular science fiction film, which somewhat belies the claim that multimedia texts are variable and often transmediatic in themselves. Substantial analysis of new media would thus have more convincingly established the continuity and remediation between traditional and new media.

The most significant drawback of the book – although one more specific to cultural studies lecturers and advanced undergraduates rather than multimedia designers – is that there is a lack of contextualisation or critical location of the methodologies and theoretical perspectives used throughout. In particular, the tension and debate between textualist and
corporealist analyses of human-technology relations that has emerged over the past few decades is glossed over rather than problematised, and at times made to seem as if neatly resolved. Although Cranny-Francis argues for an holistic approach embracing each aspect and mode of meaning-making, the analysis nevertheless retains a strong commitment to the primacy of the text: the four basic concepts – “genre, intertextuality, discourse, subjectivity” (159) – clearly come out of the semiotic tradition, while the embodied user is regarded as just one among many factors in the “composition of the text” (164) (and can be recognised only in so far as it ‘realises’ that contribution). Thus while corporeality and viscerality are clearly of central importance in the meaning-making process as theorised by Cranny-Francis, neither are critically positioned in relation to contemporary theories about embodiment and technology. Despite this, the book provides a very worthwhile account of contemporary media that will be useful for theorists in cultural studies, technology studies, new media and multimedia theory and practice. Cranny-Francis offers a refreshing ‘un-digitalisation’ of the term multimedia, and her modality approach yields many fruitful insights about the various meaning-systems that work to “coarticulate” the media text.