

USING ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY TO UNDERSTAND MEDIA FORMS AND PRACTICES:  
A ONE-DAY WORKSHOP

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*Multimodality and New Literacy Studies*. Brian Street (King's College London)

I will explore work from two fields of study, both relatively recent arrivals: Multimodality and New Literacy Studies, in both of which anthropological perspectives have been prominent. In the former there has been an attempt to redress the emphasis on writing and speech as the central, salient modes of representation, in favour of a recognition of how other modes – visual, gestural, kinaesthetic, three-dimensional – play their role in key communicative practices. So one major emphasis in work on multimodality is to develop a “language of description” for these modes, that enables us to see their characteristic forms, their affordances and the distinctive ways in which they interact with each other. Likewise, those in the field of New Literacy Studies (NLS) have attempted to provide a language of description for viewing literacy as a social practice in its social environments. Again there is an intent to change many emphases of the past – especially in educational contexts of the most varied kinds – from literacy as a static skill and to describe instead the multiple literacy practices as they vary across cultures and contexts. These approaches also draw upon work in social linguistics, education and ethnography and I will try to relate these to recent discussions of media forms and practices in anthropological circles, especially the MediaAnthro network.

Gunther Kress and Brian Street (forthcoming) Foreword to [Travel Notes from the New Literacy Studies: instance of practice](#) edited by Kate Pahl and Jennifer Rowsell Multilingual Matters (circulated by email)