

Other Floors, Other Voices: A Textography of A Small University Building (Rhetoric, Knowledge, and Society Series)

By John M. Swales

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The author describes this volume as a "textography" because it combines certain elements of both text analysis and ethnography. Through analysis of texts, textual forms, and systems of texts, it shows the lives, life commitments, and life projects of people deeply embedded in the literate culture of the university. The people examined work in a single building, but their textual lives are maintained in different times and spaces, measured by the dimensions of text production and text circulation in their fields of work. These domains of text time and space are to some degree differentiated by the three specialties that mark the three floors of a small building at a major research university--the ethnographic site of this journey into textual lives--computing, taxonomic botany, and English as a second language. This research site provides the opportunity to re-examine the concept of discourse community and to investigate the nature and origination of academic discourse from a new perspective.

The author is a distinctive member of the applied linguistics and composition communities, an original stamped by the global village of language education in which he has lived his life, and revealed in his own autobiographical account embedded within this book. This book now reveals him as a person making text about how people are embedded in making their textual lives within the discursive landscapes their communities afford. In doing so, he shows not only his own love of language as a way of life, but also his appreciation of how all his subjects find their labors of love in the language they create. This book has been written to appeal to a general academic audience as well as to specialists in rhetoric, discourse analysis, and composition.

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Editorial Review

Review

He reviews the debates critically, giving enough description and quotation of earlier studies for readers new to the issues and far from a library....such an appealing and original book.
*—**Baal News***

John Swales' textography might also be called 'comparative rhetoric in a small building,' offering proof, once again, that another culture may be only a trip up or down a flight of stairs. On its three floors, Swales finds modes of text-building as distinctive and exotic as field-workers find in remote valleys and isolated islands: one floor languaging about frozen Unix stations; the next creating, partly in Latin, the Flora Novo-Galiciana; and the third offering a range of genres that attempt to variously negotiate the 'theory-practice' requirements of English as a Second Language. Each community is closely observed and described in almost sensuous detail, so that we gain not only real insight into the way the writing is done on the three floors, but feel also the adventure of it, and, best of all, learn to hear the individual voices in each community. Swales invents for himself a robust new genre--textography--and shows how engaging a genre it can be.

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