Writing the Economy
Activity, Genre and Technology in the World of Banking

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In recent years the economic policies of major financial institutions such as the European Union Central Bank, the U.S. Federal Reserve and other countries’ central banks, and the International Monetary Fund have received growing media attention, reflecting increased public awareness of the impact of these institutions on the global economy and, more immediately, on the material conditions of our everyday lives. Writing the Economy: Activity, Genre and Technology in the World of Banking takes readers into one such site, the Bank of Canada, that country’s central bank and monetary-policy authority. Drawing on qualitative data gathered over two decades (1984-2005) and employing theories of activity, genre, narrative, and situated learning, the book provides an ethnographic account of the role of technology-mediated discourse in the Bank’s knowledge-building, policy-making, and public communication.

The first part of the book describes how the Bank’s economists employ a set of written and oral discourse genres in combination with computer-run economic models to create specialized knowledge about the Canadian economy that is applied by the organization’s senior decision-makers in directing national monetary policy. The book then examines the economists’ use of another set of technology-mediated discourse genres to orchestrate the Bank’s external communications with government, the media, the business sector, financial markets, labour, and academia. The book also explores the way in which the economists’ discourse practices facilitate individual and organizational learning and includes extended commentaries on the author’s use of the methodology of interpretive ethnography.

In a foreword, Charles Bazerman describes the book’s contribution to our understanding of organizational discourse and knowledge-making, situating this contribution in the study of economic rhetoric and the social formation of economy.

Series: Studies in Communication in Organisations and Professions

This book is unquestionably an important addition to a small but growing collection of large-
scale longitudinal studies of discourse in specific workplaces. Adding to our understanding of how organizational discourses are constructed, Smart's book effectively demonstrates how certain theories — most notably activity theory — can be usefully applied to the study of workplace communication. It will serve well as a template for the would-be researcher in the field.

Stephen Bremmer, City University of Hong Kong, in *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, Volume 22, Number 4, 2008

It is a compelling, smooth and topical read about the discursive means with which economists at a financial institution negotiate, inscribe and disseminate knowledge about Canada's monetary policy. This book is a welcome contribution to ethnographic theory, organizational discourse and applied linguistics.

Tom Van Hout, Ghent University, *Journal of Writing Research*

Writing the Economy is a timely, well-researched, and well-presented analysis of an increasingly critical national and international institution. It is clear, readable, and engaging. I recommend it highly.


Writing the Economy makes several contributions in terms of advancing theory, applying ethnography to the study of work, and examining relationships among texts. It's a solid book, and one that I expect I'll read again.

Clay Spinuzzi, University of Texas

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