

METAPATTERNS BY TYLER VOLK

Metapatterns Copyrighted Material
Across Space, Time, and Mind

TYLER VOLK



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Review

"Volk gives us new ways of thinking about and looking at the world. Intriguingly illustrated with computer and hand drawings, collages and photographs, his lyrical meditation will appeal to scientists, New Age types, interdisciplinary thinkers and the intellectually adventurous." -- "Publishers Weekly"

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From the Back Cover

In the interdisciplinary tradition of Buckminster Fuller's work, Gregory Bateson's *Mind and Nature*, and Fritjof Capra's *Tao of Physics*, *Metapatterns* embraces both nature and culture, seeking out the grand-scale patterns that help explain the functioning of our universe. *Metapatterns* begins with the archetypal patterns of space, both form building and relational. Tyler Volk then turns to the arrows, breaks, and cycles that infuse the workings of time. With artful dexterity, he brings together many layers of comprehension, drawing on an astounding range of material from art, architecture, philosophy, mythology, biology, geometry, and the atmospheric and oceanographic sciences. Richly illustrating his metapatterns with a series of sophisticated collages prepared for this book, Volk offers an exciting new look at science and the imagination. As playful and intuitive as it is logical and explanatory, *Metapatterns* offers an enlightening view of the functional, universal form in space, processes in time, and concepts in mind.

About the Author

Tyler Volk is Science Director for Environmental Studies and Professor of Biology at New York University. Recipient of the NYU All-University Distinguished Teaching Award, Volk lectures and travels widely, communicates his ideas in a variety of media, plays lead guitar for the all-scientist rock band *The Amygdaloids*, and is an avid outdoorsman. Volk's previous books include *CO2 Rising: The World's Greatest*

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Most helpful customer reviews

12 of 12 people found the following review helpful.

I was Tyler Volk's student!

By Matthew Evinger

As a freshman at NYU, I had a seminar with Tyler Volk based around Metapatterns. It is difficult to characterize the book without going on for pages, but I will do my best. Metapatterns is epistemology, meditation, mythology, systems theory, ecology, and a thousand other fields of thought. As Volk defines it, a metapattern is a "pattern of patterns... so wide-flung that it appears throughout the spectrum of reality: in clouds, rivers and planets; in cells, organisms, and ecosystems; in art, architecture, and politics." Volk is essentially a tour guide with only a rough outline of an itinerary, but this is a good thing: rigid formalism would preclude many of the connections he is making. Since each chapter is an account of one of the patterns' appearances and significance throughout the "spectrum of reality," there is a lot of ground to cover. This results in an unconventional structure but it's still easy to follow Volk from one point to the next. The collages interspersed through the book help with this a lot, especially since the whole idea of metapatterns is largely visual. Most of the time Volk is both comprehensive and coherent, but this is not always true. Occasionally (I'm sticking with the expedition metaphor here) some bushwhacking is required to get back to the original path. But the further you get into the book, the more you can follow its logic. "Spheres," the first chapter, is the strongest, and best makes the case. This may be because the sphere is, in a sense, the primary metapattern. Later chapters spring off in different directions. Some seem not to fit well (calendars, for example), but the whole time you are getting a better sense of what is actually going through Volk's mind. And eventually, as you move through the book, the ideas become self-evident. The metapatterns come to seem archetypal.

Some of the students in the seminar complained that Metapatterns was too long, too rambling, and didn't really have a point. They had a few good points, but it seemed that those students were expecting the book to provide The Answer. Metapatterns, as I understand it, is only laying out an idea. It provides a new way of looking at things, a way that could lead to some new answers, but it is not claiming to be The Answer. Part of the idea is that fields of thought are so compartmentalized and narrowly focused that a broader development is stunted. But the really revolutionary work happens in the spaces between! Bridging two or more fields allows for totally new angles on old questions. There's no inherent problem with specialization; it is only a problem when it happens to the exclusion of other avenues of thought. Volk is interdisciplinary to a point that is nearly all-encompassing.

Amazon.com states that scientists, New Age types, interdisciplinary thinkers and the intellectually adventurous will best like the book. This is true, but the book is jargon-free and easily understandable (i.e., NOT a standard science book). Do not allow yourself to peg the book; it will most likely shake off any label you apply. Instead, just pick it up without any agenda and you will probably take away something worthwhile.

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

Form, space, & disorder?

By Michael M. Simpson, R.A.

As a practicing architect who has a regular opportunity to explore the "meaningful making of space" this book was quite an eye opener. I've spent a great deal of time looking for order amongst the disorder of everyday life and the designed environment, finding the threads in "Metapatterns" was a good pathway to

understanding the relationships. If Lou Kahn were alive today, it would probably take him to new spaces and forms. Excellent!

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

extraordinary and revolutionizing

By Jeffrey W. Bloom

Tyler Volk's book, *Metapatterns...*, is an extraordinary book. In the spirit of Gregory Bateson from whom the term "metapatterns" originates, he does not give the reader the whole story or "the answer," but rather provides a rich source for readers to develop their own stories and their own answers (or to make metapatterns their own). As an educator and researcher, I have found the metapatterns described by Volk to be infinitely useful as (a) tools for analyzing data from studies of cognition, discourse, classrooms, interpersonal relationships, the politics of schooling, etc.; (b) tools for designing social and physical contexts of classrooms, curriculum, and representations of material; and (c) the specific content to study in courses. Since metapatterns appear almost everywhere in every discipline and in every aspect of everyday life, they address our basic understandings of the world in ways that can allow us to make connections in new and exciting ways. It is truly a revolutionizing book. When I have taught courses based on metapatterns, the better students have cursed me for introducing metapatterns: "damn you! All I see is metapatterns!" Such comments are a testament to the power of metapatterns in transforming the way we see the world. This book is a must read for those who are willing to take fresh view of their worlds, to think critically and creatively, and to take control of their own learning rather than be spoon fed answers.

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