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Imagologies: Media Philosophy

Mark Taylor

Esa Saarinen

The title of this book (also referred to in the antetext as "book") is given in several variants of *imagologies media philosophy*. It has been regularized at the head of this review to a conventional title format, thus betraying on the part of the reviewer a linear-mindedness probably inimical to the open pluralistic presentational intentions of the authors. But that is all right: each reader will necessarily generate an individual meaning of this stylish book /counter-book by dint of sustained scrutiny of its elaborately graphic deconstruction.

The most distinct pattern within the book's intense visual complexity is an epistolary discourse between the authors in Finland and the United States from September 4, 1991, to December 10, 1992, as they plan, and then teach, an interactive distance-learning seminar with students in both countries, all in what they refer to as a global classroom, by means of satellite and telewriting (e-mail) telecommunications systems. The course is eventually entitled " `Imagologies'--something like mythologies but for images" (p. 7 of "Communicative Practices" section). Imagology is also called "a throw-away philosophy" (p. 5 of "Superficiality" section) and they note that "imagology insists that the word is never simply a word but is always also an image" (p. 3 of "Styles" section).

The book comprises these 25 sections of imagological data-pool samples: communicative practices; simcult; styles; naïveté; media philosophy; ending the academy; pedagogies; videovisions; televangelism; superficiality; telewriting; ad-diction; interstanding; netropolis; electronics; telepolitics; speed; telerotics; cyberwar; virtuality; body snatching; cyborgs; shifting subjects; net effect; gaping. A trendy postmodern listing of lucubratory neologism and paronomasia or a playful post-McLuhanist high-energy culture probe? Probably the latter: the design is reminiscent of the flow of books from McLuhan that began with *The Medium Is the Massage* in 1967, but is hyperdesigned to a very handsome package, albeit with its own peculiarities. The front inside flap of the dust jacket and two of the three pages of antematter before the unconventional title page and

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subtitle page are promotional, beyond the publisher's blurbs, like late-Victorian and Edwardian books containing advertisements, and contemporary bestseller paperbacks quoting reviews of the earlier hardbound edition. This aspect is carried through to the penultimate flyleaf, an advertisement for "MEDIATEX a collection of fabrics designed by Marjaana Virta for Marimekko," the Finnish fabric company. Another Marimekko advertisement illustration appears in the "Ad-Diction" section, pp. 4-5, the business of culture and the culture of business. Two different photographs of the authors with different hair lengths are used at the front and back: is the reader to infer the passage of time in their correspondence? Surely no content is inadvertent in so well-made a book, so we try to unpack it.

Saarinen writes to Taylor, "Personally, I seldom read books" (p. 6 of "Superficiality" section), but he might read this book, by handling it, flipping the pages from back or front, stopping to puzzle out a child's graffito or a scribal snake, and, having been seized by the visual, attend to the literal. There is much in the 25 sections to attend to for readers who are prepared to share in the authors' parallel tracks of planning the course of study and dispensing packets of critical and cultural theory in what becomes the book of the course. Their final e-mailed exchange describes their book /non-book and its reader, "Like a hypertext, the reader should be free to chart alternative courses through the wordmass we fabricate....To the reader, who is a writer, we say: `Come, join us in a process of writing-reading /reading-writing in which all production is reproductive coproduction'" (p. 3 of "Gaping" section).

Imagologies is media philosophy at your own risk; you learn the rules of engagement when you pick up the book. Keep before you the motto of Louis Rossetto in the première issue of *Wired* (February 1993): "In the age of information overload the ultimate luxury is meaning and context."

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