REVIEWS
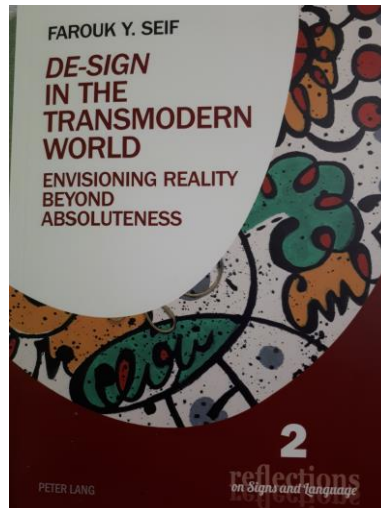
REVIEW OF THE MONOGRAPH

Farouk Y. Seif. (2019). *DE-SIGN* IN THE TRANSMODERN WORLD: ENVISIONING REALITY BEYOND ABSOLUTENESS. Switzerland: Peter Lang AG, 399 p. (ISBN 978-3-0343-2866-1)

The monograph *De-sign in the Transmodern World: Envisioning Reality Beyond Absoluteness*, published by Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, Bern, Switzerland 2019, introduces the notion of "*De-sign*" (integration of design and sign), making a case for the mutuality of design and semiotics. The philosophical-semiotic orientation draws primarily from the work of Peirce, Gebser, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, and is substantiated by empirical data from my experience and academic work during the last two decades. It is evident that there is a growing need to go beyond what we conventionally perceive into what we are imaginatively capable of interpreting. There is a salient desire to teleologically orient us toward a forward-thinking way to perceive, interpret, and reconstruct an integrative reality in an age that has emerged as transmodern.

The **Prologue** paves the way to make a case that not only do design and semiotics embody similar characteristics and cover a wide range of disciplines, but they also bridge the gap between humanities and sciences. By recognizing the global scope of semiotics and tolerating the uncertainty and ambiguity associated with design, human beings can go beyond absoluteness and envision a desirable reality. Humans are capable of developing awareness, creating relationships, and engaging in mediation towards the semiosis of an undivided wholeness in flowing movement. Humans have unlimited "semioethical" responsibility towards each other and towards other-than-human systems. The book proceeds in a manner that is intentionally driven by desire and love, leading to an unexpected outcome.

Chapter 1 (*A Subtle Shift in an Unrecognizable Age*) draws our attention to the subtle shift from postmodernity to transmodernity as being an unrecognizable age. We are no longer living in a modern
or postmodern world. Aside from their different causes, both modernity and postmodernity seem to be indistinguishable in their unintended, sociocultural consequences. Generally, there is much more continuity than difference between modernism and postmodernism. Modernity represents a linear trajectory that starts with colonialism and ends with postmodernity, which

has emanated as an eclipse of modernity by ignoring the historical success of its antecedents. Postmodernity is really the final movement of the five-centuries-old development of modernity.

Chapter 2 (***When Absolute Reality Becomes Obsolete***) makes a major argument that reality is not absolute. There is no place for absoluteness in our transmodern world, nor is there any possibility for genuine design thinking and semiotic interpretation in fixed reality. The fallacy of perceiving reality as unchangeable and immutable begins with the belief in absoluteness. We often rely on the belief in absoluteness and are afraid of abandoning obsolescence, ignoring that reality is never fixed and knowledge is always tentative. We seem to have developed a tendency to experience reality in ways we value and in manners that enable us to perceive more of what we value. What we perceive is not reality itself, but reality exposed to our way of perceiving. Absolutizing reality has far-reaching consequences as to how we value objects, things, and events in a quantitative scale of better or worse, and even leads to a misconception of God.

Chapter 3 (***What is Real is Not Always True***) takes it a step further as concerns the fallacy of absolute reality, by making an argument that what is real is not always true, and revealing the illusive relations among things, objects, and signs. This chapter also explores the dilemma of truth and falsehood, juxtaposing the notion of morality against the idea of integrity. Perceiving reality within the realm of absoluteness, and passing it on to physical things, has steered human beings to a major cognitive confusion about what is real and what is true. By playing with boundaries of space and time, the action of signs and the role of design traverse all kinds of boundaries, offering remarkable insights into human perceptions of opposites, including even life and death.

Chapter 4 (***Navigating Through Diaphanous Space and Polychronic Time***) explores the cognitive skills of *navigating through diaphanous space and polychronic time* as a heroic journey of resilience and perseverance. Spatiality and temporality are merely ordering systems, through which all objects, things, and activities in the world can be perceived as real. Navigating through space-free and time-free reality makes that reality transcendental, whereby the human experience becomes genuinely a mixture of mind-dependent and mind-independent being capable of modeling this illusion of space and time. To be able to navigate through space-time-free reality, one must rely on the cognitive phenomenon of *memory*. Design intention triggers the desire for envisioning events and creating experiences through memory. The role of memory as a phantasmagorical phenomenon is introduced as a way of playing with the boundaries of space and time to imagine a desired future.

Chapter 5 (***Transdisciplinarity and the Transmodern Lifeworld***) highlights the necessary connections between transdisciplinary knowledge and the transmodern lifeworld, the antinomies of education and training, and the difference between a generalist and an expert. It is inconceivable for human beings to live in the transmodern lifeworld without embracing transdisciplinarity, where *de-sign* inquiry is the most effective way not only to acquire knowledge, but also to harness it for reconstructing meaningful reality. The essence of transdisciplinarity is not only to think flexibly and dynamically, but also to perceive boundaries transparently. The discussion in this chapter underscores the necessity of bridging the gap between the humanities and the sciences, and introduces *de-sign* inquiry as an integration of traditional search and research methods in reconstructing reality.

Chapter 6 (***Persistence on Separation and Attempt at Integration***) exposes evidence that design and semiotics have remained as the unfamiliar two lonesomes struggling for legitimacy in the dominant familiar cultures of humanities and sciences. A case is made that integrating design and semiotics has the potential for *scientification* of the humanities and *humanization* of the sciences. During the 20th century, a few attempts toward making design and semiotics known to other

disciplines were made by integrating one or both into the humanities and sciences using different strategies: masquerading the familiar, sugarcoating the unfamiliar, and appropriating design and semiotics. These strategies are encouraging because not only do they begin to bridge the gap between humanities and sciences as advancements toward inclusive knowledge, but also they pave the way for the emergence of *De-sign* as a robust framework and an inclusive perspective.

Chapter 7 (***De-sign: The Fusion of Design and Semiotics***) focuses on *De-sign* as the fusion of design and semiotics by stressing the necessity of the co-survival of design culture and semiotic consciousness, and by revealing the kernels and mutual reciprocities between design and semiotics. Design as a way of thinking and semiotics as the action of signs were the way of life for our ancestors. At the heart of design and semiotics lies a whole network of signs permeating through space and time, and representing both what-is-in-existence and what-is-yet-to-come. Signs and life are intimately connected; for signs to exist, there must exist life, and for life to exist, there must exist signs. For signs and life to exist, there must be an act of creation, design. By elaborating on the paradoxical thinking that is innate to design and semiotics, the chapter further legitimatizes the concept of fusion.

Chapter 8 (***Perseverance Through the Paradoxes of De-sign***) explains why perseverance through paradoxes as a destiny of negation is fundamental to *De-sign*. All contradictory beliefs and bewildering antinomies are intrinsic to design thinking and semiotic interpretation, and are not only acceptable, but also welcome if only we can develop the capacity to persevere through them. Paradoxes are not problems to be solved; this is a kind of fallacy mistaking a paradox for a problem. Paradoxes are not illogical possibilities, but cognitive dissonance. Paradoxes expose our unfounded biases and unconscious assumptions about reality, which we perceive as absolute and take for granted that we know. The chapter discusses why design, as a magnificent way of thinking and acting, is intertwined with the integrative nature and transparency of signs, and how they lead to imagining and actualizing a desirable reality. Such is the splendor of design and transparency of signs.

Chapter 9 (***The Splendor of Design and the Transparency of Signs***) discusses the notion of *De-sign* in relation to Peirce's universal phenomenological categories—firstness, secondness, and thirdness—and makes a line of reasoning that *de-sign consciousness* demands the wonder of *uncommon sense*, where imagination resides and intentionality is recognized. The resilient role of signs, together with the courage to design with toleration for the distinction between the real and the true, and between objects and things, is the path for *de-sign consciousness* to recreate experience by reframing actuality and actualizing possibility. The audacity of design and the resilience of signs demand that we be comfortable navigating through diaphanous space and polychronic time, which liberates us from the nostalgic past, the gravity and limitations of the present, and the fear associated with the uncertainties of the future.

Chapter 10 (***Inseparable Braid: Design, Semiotics, and Love***) discusses how design and semiotics are connected through the unrelenting desire for wholeness, and are in a relationship of mutual fecundation of intentionality. Intentionality manifests in the inseparability of our knowledge and our formation of reality; this implies that the love of knowing and the love of creating are intertwined. The purposeful act of love is to create and the purpose of creation is to love. The reciprocal desire for creation and love is the human psyche oriented toward the integrated experience of meaning and significance. The desire for love and the making of meaningful images constitute an intentional and loving act of giving life to form, to animate the world. The inseparable braid of design, semiotics, and love is integral to all human life and is at the core of purposeful and creative action in the building of relations among human animals, other-than-human animals, and their world.

Chapter 11 (***The Love of Knowing and the Desire for Creation***) goes beyond the dualities of good and evil, pleasure and pain, beauty and ugliness, suggesting how humans deal with the paradoxes of knowledge and take a risk in the act of

creation, and how humans can make a sagacious judgement about ethical imagination in their pursuit of *De-sign*. It is the belief in absoluteness and the lack of understanding of the antinomies of life, particularly in socio-political systems, that make people perceive duality instead of persevering through paradoxes. By tolerating the uncertainty and ambiguity associated with *De-sign*, we are able to move beyond these dualities into the seductive energy of Eros. We are also capable of reframing our perception of absolute reality and absolute God. Such reframing is possible by developing *de-sign consciousness*, which engages in evolutionary love, going beyond necessity and chance into teleological choices for a desired future.

The **Epilogue** (***De-sign: The Mutual Fulfillment of God and Humans***) reaches an unexpected outcome, in which *De-sign* is to be discerned as the mutual fulfillment of God and humans. By dismantling the fallacy of absolute reality and by challenging the notion of an absolute God, the very nature of reality and the genuine meaning of God are revealed. Going beyond the philosophical debate over determinism and free will, the will of God and the desires of humans are intertwined through evolutionary love. An existential inquiry is being explored as to whether or not we are playing God in this transmodern world.

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