De-Sign in the TransModern World is no mere book. It is not merely a bound collection of sheets of paper covered with right-justified paragraphs full of printed characters distributed in twelve chapters, each one ending with a copious list of references, and the last disguised in a momentously culminating epilogue. The volume is far more than "Reflections on Signs and Language," the name of the collection edited by Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio at Peter Lang, of which this masterpiece is the second member. Farouk Seif’s work cannot hold in any collection. It is one of a kind, not equivalent to any other creation. It is, inherently, a paradox all on its own. A review of it must therefore begin with the statement of a paradox. It really is not a book. What is it, then?

There are likely many ways to characterize it. The one chosen here views it as a deeply original and seminal contribution to metaphysics as a discourse about reality’s realization. Not just any sort of metaphysics, and certainly not contemporary analytical metaphysics. Seif’s metaphysics falls straight within Peirce’s seventh class of metaphysical systems (Peirce 1903, EP2: 149 and 1903a: 180), the class of metaphysical systems that seek to give a comprehensive account of reality in terms of the three categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, especially by taking Thirdness “in its mediation between Secondness and Firstness” (Peirce 1903b, EP2: 197). As Peirce saw it, ancient philosophers such as Plato managed to do so to some extent. Modern philosophy did not because it turned nominalistic and underestimated Thirdness altogether in favor of tempting dualisms. The advent of evolutionary theories and probabilistic methods of inquiry threw a wrench into the fashionable fabrics of reductionistic certitudes. The challenge for philosophers of all stripes became both that of redesigning their methods of observation, of analysis, of synthesis, of logical reasonings, and of discursive arguments, as well as that of revising their core beliefs about the very constituents of reality and of the epistemic and cognitive conditions governing our grasp of the latter. What happens to generalizing thought when its core general classifying concepts, such as genus and species, are shown to be deeply precarious, fragile, easily buffeted by the winds of variation? What happens to the understanding of our place in the world when the human phenomenon turns out not to be as singular or special as long premised on a plank that keeps narrowing? From the standpoint of a scholastic realist thinker, metaphysics as the science of reality takes as its object the real regularities or thirdnesses that govern actual events, and therefore aims at the fundamental intelligibility, or “truly reasonable reasonableness” (Peirce 1903b, EP2: 197) that keeps shaping the universe at large and our own world, our Welt of multiple Umwelten.

How to go about prodding that intelligibility, the evolutionary logos that keeps weaving patterns and patterns of patterns within and across every modal dimension of reality and every manner of entailed experience? The apparent acceleration in the development of methods in the recent history of inquiry has gone through a succession of schools of thoughts, of intellectual fashions, and of cultural upheavals, most of which have vague beginnings and vague endings. When did the transition to the modern world begin, and when to the postmodern world, and when did they respectively come to an end if they did somehow end? Seif grapples with such questions in his initial chapter in order to situate his own “transmodern” project...
within their continuities (for no sharp discontinuities can be diagnosed). The difficulty comes in good part from the inept and short-sighted lexical strategy shackled to the label “modern,” a word that was never etymologically designed to serve as a fitting temporal marker for any period of history since it can only designate current times. It doesn’t take long for whatever is said to be “modern” to recede into the “premodern” before sinking into the antiquated. Today’s modernity is not yesterday’s modernity. That should be reason enough not to use the word except in casual rhetorical situations, but certainly not when a historian seeks to label any period for any sort of human course of action. If, for instance, the so-called modern period of philosophy shows a preponderance of writings that are both dualistic and nominalistic, then such a period would be more aptly denominated the “dualistic nominalistic period.” Were it to transition preponderantly to some sort of nominalistic idealism, then the label ought to represent it adequately. The crucial matter is to identify, for any period, some sort of dominant concept that characterizes or catches its general tendencies appropriately enough, and then to label it accordingly, though only decades later, when comparisons and contrasts are mature enough to distinguish zones of transition that are more definite than vague. Seif discusses the transition from modernism to postmodernism without any sort of naiveté in that regard, well aware of the synechistic nature of such transitions. It really doesn’t matter for his own purposes whether or not the transition from postmodernism to another -ismable label has or has not already occurred. What is clear to him is that a transition has been occurring and has been in preparation for a long time. It’s like watching large waves far in the offing rolling toward the coastline, tumbling into each other, fading, blending, or re-emerging over long distances before finally reaching the beach, flattened, and immediately receding to let another wave submerge them. Waves are thirds that govern the motions of innumerable parts that are barely dissociable. They have no sharp beginning or ending. Their motions and their energies vary. But somehow one can tell when a really large wave displays enough roguery to be sensed as “something else,” not quite like the previous wave of waves. Seif’s sense is that we have been transitioning to a transmodern world in transmodern times. Well, we are in trans-times, times where ancient and modern substantialisms are no longer rolling in, while relationisms, inter-isms, trans-isms, cross-isms, even beyond-isms, are now submerging social and cultural coastlines.

Seif’s definition of transmodernity (Seif 2019: 35, middle paragraph) contains several components of interest, bathed as they are in a terminology dear to John Deely. The first, negative, element is the abandonment of the idea that objectuality is only rooted in mind-independence. The second, positive, element is a reconception of objective reality in terms of its transparent perception (eschewing opacity), a grasp that whatever is mind-independent and whatever is mind-dependent are in semiotic interrelation, and that such interrelation is pragmatic in that it leads to a continuous process of interpretation that moves back and forth between realizing thought and realized action in ways that are fundamentally intelligible, corrective, social, life-sustaining, and world-configuring. At work in this insight is also a call for reconceiving the relationship between humanity and its lifeworld environment. This is an impetus with a long storied history, one that has gone through many transmutations across cultures, and which has become especially urgent in our times. To give just one never published example, when French historian of philosophy, Gérard
Deledalle (1921–2003) encountered the philosophy of John Dewey in the late 1940s thanks to his access to the library the US Third Army had brought to France, he was just coming out of a deep and sustained reading of the principal existentialist thinkers. The war was over, and there was a pressing need for a revised metaphysics that would revisit and revitalize the battered idea of man. For a brief moment¹ Deledalle (the thinker who introduced both Dewey and Peirce to the European continent) felt tempted to try to come up with his own philosophical solution. The problem to be solved, in his eyes, was that so far metaphysics had been too anthropocentric: it had been hampered by “the will to reach the world’s nature using human logic as a starting point,” thus a mere “human metaphysics, a ‘meta-andrics’.” That kind of metaphysics was not worthless, but only “a stage in the history of thought.” Deledalle added: “It is time man produced a metaphysics of the world, of the cosmos, a diaphysics.” “Diaphysics is both broader and narrower than metaphysics; broader, it embraces the universe in its entirety, narrower, it does not leave it.” The task of Deledalle’s diaphysics was to “recover man at his birth and place him back into his first natural context, unknown to him, cosmogonical for him, known to us, scientific for us.” Replacing meta with dia was to quit the beyond and learn to navigate what flows through, transfluence itself. Deledalle never went beyond that inchoative impetus precisely because he encountered Dewey’s pragmatist philosophy, which made him discover Peirce’s semiotic logic and metaphysics a few years later. He likely realized there was no need for him to be a diaphysician. Here were prodigiously seminal thinkers who had already provided the desired rigorous revision of the starting point.

Farouk Seif’s no-mere-book is in this regard a work of diaphysical art (and at this moment the culmination of a lifetime of uberesus rumination). One has only to look at the topographical map, aka detailed table of contents, of the large expanse of territory he has explored—or, to use a more apt metaphor given Seif’s architectural background, at the blueprint for the impressive dodecagonal structure he has erected. The aim is to envision reality “beyond absoluteness”—thus beyond anything beyond. This is in phase with Peirce’s fallibilism, as Seif readily acknowledges—Peirce who, in the early 1890s, vigorously professed that particular -ism, which advocated the exclusion of several absolutes: absolute certainty, absolute exactitude, absolute regularity, absolute determination, absolute truth, absolute universality. Seif’s method strives to transcend the transcendent, and how he does so is what this review intends to focus on. The Latin prefix trans-, as he notes, means both through and beyond. But there are two

¹ Undated manuscript for a book on “Diaphysique” c. mid 1950s to early 1960s, Papers of Gérard Deledalle, Institute for American Thought, IUPUI — thus perhaps conceived not long after Jean Gebser published the two parts of his Ursprung und Gegenwart, translated in 1985 under the title The Ever-Present Origin, one of the principal inspirational influences throughout Farouk Seif’s chapters. Other major influencers include David Bohm, Paul Cobley, Marcel Danesi, John Deely, Susan Petrilli, and Thomas Sebeok. Aside from the ever-present Peirce, other major philosophers referred to include Martin Heidegger, William James, Søren Kierkegaard, and Alfred North Whitehead. In a letter to Herbert Schneider written on 3 March 1962, Deledalle confided that he had been conceiving his major book, L’idée d’expérience dans la philosophie de John Dewey, as a two-part work focused on Dewey’s quest for a “metaphysics of existence,” and that knowing that Dewey did not like the term “metaphysics” because of its pre-Darwinian sense. Deledalle then thought of coining the term “diaphysics”, not to be used in connection to Dewey but separately for a book that would have that title. Another nearly empty folder in the Deledalle collection bears the phrase “Esquisse d’une diaphysique séméiologique” as part of its cover title. That suggests an inchoative plan for some sort of semiotic metaphysics.
sorts of beyond: the relative and the absolute. The absolute beyond is the beyond in phase with the etymology of the word ‘absolute’: solus ab, alone away from, the separate solitude of that which is at once far above and detached from anything underneath: the unreachable and unrepresentable, the non-projective point outside any map. The ‘trans’ that prefixes Kant’s conception of the transcendental connotes that kind of beyondness—which is the very reason why young Peirce rejected, both instinctively and logically, Kant’s transcendentalism (as early as May 1859). Another pragmatist, Josiah Royce, struggled all his life to develop a metaphysics of the Absolute. He kept revising that notion until he eventually managed to get rid of its detachment, finding the ultimate solution through a re-reading of Peirce’s 1867 essay “On a New List of Categories” and finding in Peirce’s conception of the interpretant the logical foundation for his “Community of Interpretation”—an Absolute whose “ab-” had utterly dissolved, so that the solus could no longer be alone. There was still a sense of beyondness, no longer supremely removed but connected because it only pointed at the other accessible end of a bridge that remained standing once crossed, while also aiming at the horizon beyond, the background that brought the end into relief and made it desirable and worth fulfilling. Both Peirce and Royce therefore envisioned a reality beyond absoluteness, for both emphasized, in their distinct but compatible ways, continuity over discontinuity. Seif’s architectural contribution is to add twelve piles under the realist-idealist pragmatist bridge. That is where the beyond becomes relative. There are two kinds of relative beyondness (or non-transcendental transcendence): the transiting kind and the bypassing kind. Seif transcends in both ways: he urges us to bypass absolutes without concession, but to retain the constructive aspects of modernity and postmodernity as we traverse them. This may sometimes take the form of a Hegelian Aufhebung or sublation (an inclusive integration: see Seif 2019: 39), sometimes the semiotic form of a translation or reinterpretation, but in all cases some form of redesign.2

How does Seif manage to do so? The adjective “hypostatic” in the title of this review provides one clue. Seif’s blueprint and architectural chapters teem with hypostatic abstractions, both old and new. Most are borrowed from an array of traditions, and most are reinterpreted through subtle shifts, adjustments, surprising contrasts, revealing paradoxes, and especially a philosophical framework at once evolutionary, agapastic, and synechistic. At work are distinct kinds or classes of such abstractions that vary according to their breadth or depth. The most fundamental are of the order of Peirce’s categories (firstness, secondness, thirdness). Others have to do with the logical properties of concepts, or with the qualities of the experience denoted by some concepts. One very special one takes on an unusual form, fully rhematic, but

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2 This oscillation between a Hegelian and a Peircean pattern surfaces in several places in Seif’s work, but especially strikingly toward the end of chapter 9, when he describes the drive within De-sign: the unrelenting desire for wholeness. Seif describes the triadic process of that drive (by then called the love of wholeness, which he renders in pseudo-Greek as wholophilia when holophilia would have been the more holistic spelling) as follows: the process starts from (1) the realization that no whole is ever whole enough: its inherent incompleteness is ontological; (2) that incompleteness gets recognized: whatever is lacking becomes experientially urging; (3) the desire to overcome that experience emerges to attain our longed-for wholeness (Seif 2019: 278). Now, an operative desire is how Peirce defined a purpose in his essay “On Science and Natural Classes” (Peirce 1902, EP2: 118). Such a desire is at once general in its form, vague as to its object, and elastic as to its realization—meaning that it opens up multiple possibilities of interpretations, strategies, and implementations. At bottom, purposive desire is a symbolically driven drive, and therefore genuinely triadic.
in what at first might seem to be an iconic way: a hyphen. It stands for some sort of “trans”, a conjunctive kind that is also a coupling (not a pairing), the kind of copulative connection that ends up giving birth to a child that transcends its parents. It’s the hyphen that designs the compound De-Sign. It takes a while to get used to it, but getting used to it, that hyphen, matters a great deal, for the whole work depends on it and actually speaks in its name. That hyphen stands for the work’s dynamic object; it hypostatizes it and turns it at once into an object and a clue of inquiry.

What makes this worth emphasizing is Peirce’s explanation of the logic of hypostatic abstractions. That Peirce extolled the virtus dormitiva adduced by Molière’s team of physicians to explain opium’s power is well-known. Contemptuous philosophers dismissed it in terms of an overly technical circular or tautological question-begging explanation. But Peirce saw in it a fundamental move that conditioned any possible inquiry. The point that mattered was not explanation but identifying correctly what needed to be investigated. It’s a matter not only of identifying the fruitful or ubeorous starting point of a chain of hypotheses, but also of expressing it in a way that helps focus one’s attention persistently onto it for the sake of intellection. Peirce defines the sign relation as one in which the object utters signs apt to urge interpretants to attend to the same object that those signs are solicited by. The reason for insisting that interpretants need to stand for that same object, and not some other one, is the elementary condition of inquiry: keep focusing on the question at hand, don’t get distracted, and find a way to demystify the mystery it represents. To pay singular and undivided attention to something while neglecting everything else is what an act of abstraction is all about. Does one want to know what it means to say that something, anything, is hard? Then hold that property up high into your inquisitive mind, isolate it from everything else, and make it both the starting point and the endpoint of your inquiry, for you shall study it for its own sake. The property gets detached from any embodiment and turns into an object of investigation: hardness it is named. It turns into a hypostasis: that which stands under, and thereby becomes the determining seat and focus of, any subsequent investigation. As a hypostatic abstraction, it determines or shapes whatever hypothesis will be thrown at it, for such hypotheses cannot but be relevant to it in one respect or other, and it is such respects that the abstraction gets to govern.

Such is the general character of Seif’s method of inquiry. His starting point is a hyphen. Etymologically speaking, ‘hyphen’ is a word that entered English in the seventeenth century, derived according to the Oxford English Dictionary from the late Latin word ‘hyphen’ itself derived from the late Greek ἡ ὑφέν, the substantive form of the adverb ὑφέν, ‘together’, ‘in one’, a word composed of ὑφ’, ὑπό, ‘under’, and ἕν, ‘one’. Thus hyp + hen gives hyphen, that which subtends unity by unifying. The hyphen’s power is that of a connecting link that erases discontinuities: it is fundamentally trans-, fundamentally synechistic. Indeed, lines are not made of points; they are made of hyphens. Any line is a prolonged hyphen. The hyphen is therefore a particularly excellent case of hypostasis, also because it is not merely static but dynamic: it is a unifying linking agent, and as such a remarkable copula all of its own, and thus not so much iconic as purely symbolical: sym- comes from συν, also a gathering agency in Greek.

Seif’s plan is to get Design and Semiotics to collaborate, and more precisely to enter into an integrative participation. The hyphenated concept De-Sign is designed to signal such an integration (a fusion that is not a confusion) by hypostatizing it, and so turning it itself into the
starting point and the endpoint of an inquiry—a metaphysical inquiry in this case. What Seif means by unhyphenated Design is also to be taken as a hypostasis, thus a live abstraction separated from its implementations. A look at the index at the end of the volume reveals an interesting acte manqué in that regard: the entries for “design” and the subsequent (italicized) “De-sign” are alphabetically misplaced. Instead of sitting between “deception” and “desire,” they sit between “double” and “duality.” Maybe that misplacement was done by design, to avoid its deceptive association with deception (Seif 2019: 175) and emphasize the duality between design and the unified double word De-sign. Whatever the case may be, one subentry under “design” catches the most attention: “design thinking.” It is followed by a long list of page numbers (not the longest, though: other entries are followed by longer lists, such as “idea,” “life,” “process,” “semitic interpretations,” and, a bit puzzlingly, “things”). Seif thinks of design itself as a hypostasis which he wanted to capitalize into Design, but understandably refrained from doing so for design reasons. Hypostatically, Design is an abstractive generalization of any sort of design activity: the common kind of “cognitive activity” or indeed thinking that all such activities share. Seif explains in chapter 6 that “neither design nor semiotics is a discipline or field, but a framework or perspective”; he adds that “only through dialogical engagement, thinking and imagining together, can design and semiotics attract or seduce each other toward fusion” (Seif 2019: 168). By Design he means the “primordial act of creation” (Seif 2019: 171) by any purposive agent, whether nature itself or human beings, of whatever gets produced with a form fashioned to transcend the very object that carries it in order to fulfill some larger aim. Design thinking, he insists, is arational and ascientific, not irrational and unscientific, in part because it is qualitative, and in part because it is actively teleological: it is intentionality at work, a kind of thoughtful creative activity that actuates potentialities by shaping and thus empowering conditions that enable their optimal fulfillment.

Symptomatic in one of the quoted phrases above is the dynamic power given to hypostatic abstractions. Seif wants to get design and semiotics to “attract and seduce each other,” up to the point when they get hyphenated (but he makes it clear that this union is not a marriage, rather a partnership). He is not talking like, say, a sociologist who would invite particular groups of designers and semioticians to assemble in a room and talk to (or with) one another in order to hash out some particular project. Instead, what interests Seif is, throughout all chapters, to get a grasp of the dynamic of general processes: their inner dynamic and their interactional dynamic with other processes. That’s what he hypostatizes: those very processes, their dynamics, their qualities, and their properties. He seeks to unveil the logic of it all and to show how they work themselves out with what sort of general consequences. In many ways, Seif is showing the design of Design as much as of De-Sign, and especially of the hyphenation of Design with Signs. In so doing, Seif is doing genuine philosophical work, a work that entails, most Peirceanly, a gift for phaneroscopy (the description of how such hypostatic abstractions are phaneralizing themselves); a deep care for the normative sciences (aesthetics obviously, but also ethics given the pervasive significance allotted to moral concerns of integrity and responsibility throughout the work with several bows given for instance to Susan Petrilli’s

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The index is uneven in that regard and would have gained to be better designed, with a lot more helpful subentries. John Deely would have appreciated that effusively.
André De Tienne

semioethics, and logic as semiotics); and as already shown, a creative investigation of
metaphysics in the spirit of the seventh system.

To provide just one example among many (hypostases that matter are listed in the index),
let’s observe how Seif deals with diaphaneity, a hypostatic abstraction inherited from Jean
Gebser that Seif sees as being “at the core of transmodernity” (Seif 2019: 42). Seif favors
metaphors of transparency, of seeing through (transvision indeed), metaphors that remove
whatever blocks heuristic insights and provide access to the telling or unveiling forms. Just as it
is important to regularly change the filters in ventilation machinery because they get clogged,
shifting out of “outdated habits and blind beliefs into a transparent integral consciousness”
(Seif 2019: 40) is the progressive promise of transmodernity’s way of unclogging belief systems.
Today’s times’ insistence on seeing through and changing through to facilitate integration is an
expression of that promise. It appears that the logic at work here is not the logic of exclusive
disjunction (which excludes middles), but the logic of inclusive disjunction, which strengthens a
certain kind of middle ground—a mediating one. Integration does not mean synthesis (a logic of
conjunction that dissolves differences) but the capacity to recognize whatever manages to
show through a succession or alternation of filters without causing exclusions, for exclusion is
opacification. Take for instance the classical opposition between nominalism and realism. One
thing it is to choose one particular camp and defend it against the other unremittingly. Another
thing it is to observe what positive insights are produced by either camp, observe their
respective contributory relevance, and get a sense of the logic of the extent to which their
perspectives agree and disagree. Only at that point can then one move out of either
perspective and step into an inclusive “aperspectival” standpoint that happens not to be a point
but a hyphen, the connector that does not marry but partners, a prospective vista that charts
and maps the distribution and orientation of perspectives down below and exhibits how they
work together to form the very map that shows them through while respecting their variations.
This is a hyphenating vista: it traces connective lines between perspectives, not haphazardly,
but in ways that exhibit patterns and hierarchies of patterns—the kind of map that exhibits the
otherwise invisible structures that govern even sets of extraordinarily distant galaxies. In the
case of the distinction between nominalism and realism, and other -isms, Peirce’s map of the
seven systems of metaphysics is just such a diaphanous example of an aperspectival hyphen,
one that took a detour by the fundamental structure of the categories to make sense of them
all, exhibiting all at once the possibilities of their distinct contributions to the larger tri-
categorial view.

Transmodernity appears to be motivated by such an integrative aim, indeed “supported by
Peirce’s doctrine of synechestism” as Seif warrants (Seif 2019: 43). Important to notice is that
diaphaneity is a condition of heuristic interpretation because, without it, comparison and
correlation are impossible. Peirce understood that in 1867 (a possible “starting hyphen” for
genuine postmodernism in Deely’s view, or transmodernism admittedly) in—again—his text on
“the New List of Categories.” Indeed, when he comes to explain the process of comparison in
the ninth section of that seminal argument—the section (Peirce 1867, EP1: 5) that makes an
inductive case for the reality of the interpretant—it is by showing that the act of interpretance
is the active act that seeks to see one thing through other things by designing some sort of
contrivance, such as an imaginary graph, that allows two distinct objects to be seen through
each other, thereby exhibiting a commonality that in turn allows one to enter the same class as
the other, whether the foundation of the commonality was monadic, dyadic, or triadic. That
entire act of creating a comparative device that manages to bring together (correlate) disparate
appearances so that commonalities can show through and be recognized so as to enable the
attribution of a predicate to something in need of just such a determination is the operation of
interpretance. The interpretant in that essay is presented as the “mediating representation”—
the creation of a map that helps identify what’s out there, what’s their potential, their
significance, especially their pragmatic significance in a Peircean sense.

Diaphaneity is thus at the core of any process of inquiry. What Seif is doing is to expand the
reach of that condition. Indeed, he is talking of the need for “diaphanous perception” as a
condition for integrative consciousness: the non-exclusionary perception that remains on the
alert in order not to be blinded by forms becoming too preponderant. Scientific progress, for
one thing, depends on perceptual flexibility: one pattern can disguise or hide others, and it
requires acute powers of discrimination and abstraction to take notice of telling irregularities
that suggest the reality of other forces at play. Maintaining diaphaneity no doubt requires
training—phaneroscopic training at the very least. Why does that matter? Because in the end
what will and ought to show through is not this or that form, but “the whole” (Seif 2019: 64):
the aperspectival encompassing vista whose comprehensiveness provides comprehension. The
role of semiosis, Seif intimates, is to exhibit especially those relations that are continuous and
that contribute themselves to promoting transparency and further integration.

One particular area of application of diaphaneity as a hypostatic (but also hypodynamic, so
to speak) agent of intellection gets displayed in Seif’s metaphysics (or diaphysics) of space. For
philosopher Seif knows that he had better give, in a transmodern metaphysical treatise, some
at least incipient or programmatic account of space, as well as of time of course. This he does
(as he also does with other key conceptions this selective review has no space to cover: Seif’s
discussion of truth and reality in chapter 3 is something to behold, for instance) notably in his
formidable chapter 4, “Navigating through diaphanous space and polychronic time.” Given the
rejection of absolute concepts, it follows that proper understanding of space and time needs to
de-absolutize them. Making space and time absolute entails for instance that one cannot travel
through time or to be in multiple spaces simultaneously. That impossibility creates a barrier for
the possible. But Seif explains that the impossible is not the negation of the possible, it is rather
“what happens outside our anticipated condition of possibility, a leap outside the realm of our
expectations” (Seif 2019: 110). The impossible is the possible that our blinders prevent us from
seeing or that our laws or institutions are blocking under the fog of fear. But declaring
something to be impossible may be the first step or opportunity to find out what needs to be
done in order to deny its negation. Much of our history is after all a transition from the
impossible to the possible. One might object that if an impossible turns out to be possible, it
was possible to begin with. And so it was, in some sort of metaphysics detached from
experience and history. Real metaphysics, however, is constrained by the historical views of
historical metaphysicians, who will decree that some states of things are impossible and turn
that into a foundational absolute—until that foundation begins cracking because some ancient
axiom got exploded. Parallel lines may well meet, if your name is not Euclid.
Absolute concepts trigger absolute ideologies and social, cultural, or cognitive values, Seif warns; from there derive limitations of experience and action. Quantum theory and relativity theory have changed all that. Now is the age of counterintuitivity, which happens to be integrative. Can we travel through time and be all at once in different locations? That all depends on one’s perspective, or complete lack thereof. Seif is not really interested in boarding a time-traveling machine. What is far more than sufficient, and likely quite affordable, is to attend to the real potential offered by intelligent and visionary imagination (where intellect is the capacity to read relations or grasp what the between is made of: after all, what is “trans” happens in the “inter,” the hyphenating flux in between). Indeed, whatever is diaphanous requires the work of imagination. Comparison is an exercise in imagination. Current tools of augmented virtual reality provide astonishing sensory experiences not otherwise encountered in regular indoors or outdoors. Seif tells us not to dismiss those expansions of experience: they are real, after all, and they therefore have real effects. “Navigating through diaphanous space and polychronic time is a cognitive, noetic journey that triggers imaginative thinking and innovative action”—it requires spatial and temporal imaginative intelligence (Seif 2019: 113).

There is the real stake: the transmodernization of metaphysical concepts and categories is essential, in his view, “for creating a meaningful and sustainable future reality” (ibid.), for there is something inherently liberating in playing with the boundaries of space and time through a well-directed imagination capable of transporting us where we would not otherwise be with living beings we shall not otherwise encounter at a time of our choosing that otherwise might be never. Illusion? Simply turn on the television or put on your mixed reality headset. But then learn how to watch: not passively: enter the play, be the actor, and, why not, change the script as it goes. Of course, the real stakes are much higher: they really have to do with reinventing our planet for the sake of future generations, and a good way of doing that is by imagining that we are part of those future generations. Then it becomes easier to veer off course responsibly before it is too late. Seif has much to say about imagining future memory.

The task of reviewing Seif’s whole book (vying for wholeness) is not impossible, but impractical since he says so much of value on every page that would require attentive interpretance, and that would take a review far longer than the work itself. Every chapter is worth pondering for years. Chapter 9, “The Splendor of Design and the Transparency of Sign,” is another key chapter that begins by connecting De-sign with Peirce’s three categories. That is helpful to understand what the natural connection between De-sign and thirdness immediately entails, categorically speaking, in regard also to firstness and secondness. As Vincent Colapietro often writes, Peirce intended his categories “to guide and goad inquiry.” And Seif lets his entire train of thinking be so guided and goaded, with magnificent and inspirational effects, just as could have been expected — except that nothing would have enabled anyone to predict decades ago that one day such a broadly read and deeply thought-out artwork (as work of philosophical art) would have taken the form of De-Sign in the Transmodern World. Chapter 10, in its way of bringing together design, semiotics, and love, is a lesson in how to continue Peirce’s essay on “Evolutionary Love.” Seif insists on Eros (“the generator-of-desire”) as the trigger for all forms of Love, including Peirce’s Agape, and manages at the same time to bring De-sign within the framework of teleology. This fundamental eroticism is brought into play in the penultimate chapter that among other considerations turns deeply ethical. The Epilogue, or
unnumbered chapter 12, is the appropriate end of what turns out to be a transmodern Bonaventurian *Itinerarium mentis ad Deum*. Titled “De-sign: The Mutual Fulfillment of God and Humans,” it represents the culmination of Seif’s journey. God is no longer absolute, no longer detached, but represented less as a designer than, of course, as the De-signer that is also in need of human de-sign and desire, notably through Peircean musement, or imagination. “What we must do is simply open our hearts and minds to realize that the phenomenon of *De-sign* has been in our consciousness for eons” (Seif 2019: 372). The divine could not escape from an exemplary transmodern essay in metaphysics, and it is fitting that Seif’s creation ends by so identifying the Spirit whose breath is hypostatized in what never was a mere hyphen.

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1962. Private letter to Herbert W. Schneider, 3 March 1962, from a printout of transcriptions made by Deledalle, black binder labeled “American Correspondence,” Max H. Fisch Library, Institute for American Thought, IUPUI. Original copy in brown envelope marked “Herbert W. Schneider” within a box labeled “Correspondance américaine.”

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