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## Chapter 10

# Gesture, Labor, and Semiosis: Some Research Hypotheses for a Theoretical Convergence between Semiotics and Dialectics

**Abstract:** In this chapter, I will try to illustrate how semiotics and dialectical theory can converge towards a common analysis of cognitive processes. The concept of “*gesture*” will constitute the meeting point between the two approaches. My starting point will be the argumentations thematized by Giovanni Maddalena in his 2011 article “Lavoro come conoscenza. Uno sguardo semiotico”—i.e., “Labor as knowledge. A semiotic overview.” According to Maddalena, the teleological structure of *labor*—understood in a Hegel-Marxian sense—presents some homologies with what he defines as “complete gesture” (Maddalena 2015), i.e., a *model of synthetic reasoning* based on the three *semiotic* elements posited by Charles S. Peirce (1839–1914), i.e., *Icon*, *Index*, and *Symbol*. More specifically, Maddalena’s proposal conjugates the Hegel-Marxian meaning of labor—understood precisely as “a type of purposeful action” (Maddalena 2011, 3, my translation)—with the pragmatist reworking of the Kantian paradigm, defining labor as a model of *synthetic reasoning*: labor is “our way of reasoning synthetically” (Maddalena 2011, 10, my translation). The theoretical convergence between the Marxian concept of “labor” [*Arbeit*] and the pragmatist concept of “gesture” can be further confirmed by developing a parallel between Peirce’ and Ernst Bloch’s (1885–1977) theories of knowledge. In this regard, I will underline two aspects: a) both authors hypothesize a *phenomenological* foundation for their theory of categories: categories are elements of *experience* (according to Peirce) and products of *praxis* (according to Bloch); and b) both authors develop a theory of categories strongly connected with the issue of *temporality*. Furthermore, I will underline that Bloch’s theory of knowledge is characterized by an element which contributes to the parallel between labor and gesture: indeed, by establishing a homological relation between the *act of gazing*—the theoretical act *par excellence* (see Petrosino 2004)—and the *act of manipulating*, Bloch emphasizes the fundamental role played by the *gestural dimension* in the knowledge process.

**Keywords:** dialectics, gesture, labor, Marxism, pragmatism, semiotics

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# 1 Introduction

In *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* [*The Principle of Hope*] (1959), Ernst Bloch (1885–1977) argues that pragmatist gnoseology is based on a kind of “aha-experience of truth” (Bloch 1996, 275); this means that a certain experience can be defined as “true” if it is “aimed at practical success and actually shows itself to be suitable for bringing it about” (Bloch 1996, 275).

More specifically, Bloch refers to William James’ (1842–1910) pragmatism, emphasizing its “life-promoting and optimistic” (Bloch 1996, 276) perspective. Indeed, pragmatism “professed to be the patron of those various, interchangeable, logical ‘instruments’ with which the higher order of businessman achieves almost ‘humanitarian success’” (Bloch 1996, 276). However, this was not enough to ward off the “agnostic” drift (see Bloch 1996, 276) of this philosophical approach. According to Bloch, from James onwards, pragmatism would no longer deal with the question of “truth,” “not even as if it were at least an ‘instrument’ to be maintained” (Bloch 1996, 276). Moreover, James’ epigones would have made the idea that truth is what is helpful to “humanitarian success” into the idea that truth is what is useful to “maximum profit” (Bloch 1996, 276).

These considerations by Bloch about pragmatism frame the background against which I will try to develop some research proposals. My intention is not to proceed with an in-depth analysis of the relationship between Bloch and pragmatism; nor, conversely, with an analysis of the relationship between Marxism—including Bloch’s version—and James’ pragmatism; likewise, I do not intend to formulate a critique of Bloch’s positions. In short, my aim here is not to demonstrate that Bloch’s misgivings about pragmatism are plausible nor that he misunderstood its assumptions.

Rather, with this chapter, I wish to propose a different background hypothesis: despite his “political” and “theoretical” judgement of pragmatism, in his later monograph *Experimentum Mundi* (1975), Bloch outlines a theory of knowledge that could be seen to converge with the theory of knowledge structured by another of the founders of this philosophical approach: Charles S. Peirce (1839–1914).<sup>1</sup> Developing this hypothesis, I will attempt to illustrate how the concept of “gesture”—as elaborated by Giovanni Maddalena (2015)—offers a point of en-

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1 In my view, Bloch is actually referring to summary interpretations of pragmatism; interpretations from which Peirce—well before Bloch’s perplexities—distanced himself, going so far as to redefine the doctrine he founded with James as *Pragmaticism* (see CP 5.414). Indeed, in *What Pragmatism Is* (1905), Peirce explicitly criticizes those readings that reduce pragmatism to the assumption that “a conception is to be tested by its practical effects” (CP 5.422). Rather, pragmatism consists “in holding that the purport of any concept is its conceived bearing upon our con-

counter between Bloch's dialectical approach and Peirce's semiotics. More specifically, my proposal is inspired by Maddalena's argumentations as thematized in his 2011 article "Lavoro come conoscenza. Uno sguardo semiotico"—i.e., "Labor as knowledge. A semiotic overview." According to Maddalena, the teleological structure of *labor*—understood in a Hegel-Marxian sense—presents homologies with what he defines as "complete gesture" (Maddalena 2015), that is, a *model of synthetic reasoning* based on the three *semiotic* elements posited by Peirce: *Icon*, *Index* and *Symbol*.

Starting from these assumptions, my aim is to demonstrate that the theoretical convergence between the Marxian concept of "labor" [*Arbeit*] and the pragmatist concept of "gesture" can be further confirmed by developing a parallel between Peirce's and Bloch's theories of knowledge.

In the next section, I will briefly introduce two of the main concepts of this chapter: i.e., *labor* and *semiosis*. To illustrate the connection between them, I will mention two authors who structured their theories starting from Peircean semiotics: Charles Morris (1901–1979) and Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1921–1985).

In §3, I will develop the parallel between Peirce and Bloch, focusing on two aspects: a) both authors hypothesize a *phenomenological* foundation for their theory of categories: categories are elements of *Experience* (according to Peirce) and products of *Praxis* (according to Bloch); b) both authors develop a theory of categories strongly connected with the issue of *temporality*.

In §4, I will underline how Bloch's theory of knowledge is characterized by an element which contributes to the parallel between labor and gesture: indeed, by establishing a homological relation between the *act of gazing*—the theoretical act *par excellence* (see Petrosino 2004)—and the *act of manipulating*, Bloch underlines the fundamental role played by the *gestural dimension* in the knowledge process.

## 2 Labor as *Purposeful Activity*: A Semiotic Insight

In this section, I will illustrate how a convergence between *labor*—understood in a Marxian sense—and *semiosis*—understood in a Peircean sense—can be established. As stated, this connection can be posited by starting from Morris' and Rossi-Landi's semiotics. In this regard, I believe that it is helpful to clarify how Morris re-elaborates Peirce's conception of *semiosis* and how Rossi-Landi in turn

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duct" (CP 5.460). The acronym "CP" refers to the extended title *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*.

starts from Morris' sign model to posit his semiotic reading of the Marxian category of "labor."<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, to reconstruct this theoretical continuity, it is necessary to start with Peirce's definition of "semiosis": "by "semiosis" I mean [. . .] an action, or influence, which is, or involves, a cooperation of *three* subjects, such as a sign, its object, and its interpretant" (CP 5.484). According to Maddalena, this idea of semiosis introduces "a new form of representation centred on the analysis of the relationship between the representamen (namely, the sign itself), the object of reference, and the interpretant (namely, the function of interpretation)" (2015, 20). In addition, this inextricable connection between representation and semiosis implies another concept: *knowledge*. The Peircean approach assumes that "any knowledge is representation and any representation is constituted by semiosis" (Maddalena 2015, 119). In this context, the concept of *complete gesture* can be understood as a "particular kind of semiosis constituted by different and densely arranged types of signs and phenomena" (Maddalena 2015, 119).

In the light of these assumptions, it seems appropriate to consider (very briefly) how Peirce conceives "representation." In the 1865 *Harvard Lectures*, Peirce distances his understanding of the concept from the Kantian idea of *Vorstellung*: "Representation, indeed is not a perfect translation of the term, because it seems necessary to imply a mediate reference to its object, which *Vorstellung* does not" (Peirce 1982, 257);<sup>3</sup> moreover, he not only refuses William Hamilton's (1788–1856) definition of *mediate cognition*, but also the Hegelian acceptance of representation as *mental image* [*Build*]. Instead, "representation" is used by Peirce in its etymological and ordinary meaning as "anything which is supposed to stand for another" (1982, 257). As we know, *icon*, *index*, and *symbol* are three different modalities in which the sign represents the object.

Starting from Peirce's theses, Morris in *Foundations of a Theory of Signs* (1938) defines semiosis as a process involving three (or four) factors:

that which acts as a sign, that which the sign refers to and the effect on some interpreter in virtue of which the thing in question is a sign to that interpreter. These three components in semiosis may be called, respectively, the *sign vehicle*, the *designatum*, and the *interpretant*; the *interpreter* may be included as a fourth factor. These terms make explicit the factors left undesignated in the common statement that a sign refers to something for someone. (Morris 1938, 3)

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<sup>2</sup> Theoretical continuity between Peirce and Morris and again between Morris and Rossi-Landi has often been underlined; in this regard, see Petrilli (1999); A. Ponzio (2012); and Borrelli (2014 and 2020).

<sup>3</sup> In this regard, see Julia Ponzio (2020).

More specifically, according to Morris, “in semiosis something takes account of something else mediately, i.e., by means of a third something. Semiosis is accordingly a mediated-taking-account-of. The mediators are *sign vehicles*; the takings-account-of are *intepretants*; the agent of the process are *interpreters*; what is taken account of are *designata*” (1938, 3). Nevertheless, semiosis is endowed with a further fundamental characteristic: *semiosis* is the process through which an interpreter “takes account of relevant properties of absent objects, or unobserved properties of objects which are present” (Morris 1938, 32). Starting from this property, it is possible to outline a convergence between the concept of “semiosis”—as structured by Peirce and Morris—and the Marxian concept of “labor.” For this purpose, it is helpful to focus on *materialistic semiotics* as elaborated by Rossi-Landi.

Indeed, Rossi-Landi proposed a semiotic interpretation of a fundamental acceptance of the Marxian category of “labor”: i.e., labor as *purposeful*—or, *goal oriented*—activity [*zweckmäßige Tätigkeit*]. This concept designates one of the four moments of the *labor process* [*Arbeitsprozess*] as structured in *Capital* (1867). It is common knowledge that, according to Marx, “the simple moments of the labor process are (1) purposeful activity [*zweckmäßige Tätigkeit*], that is work itself [*Arbeit selbst*], (2) the object on which that work is performed, and (3) the instruments of that work” (Marx 2002, 453).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the *product* constitutes the fourth and final moment of the process: “in the labor-process, therefore, human activity, through the instruments of labor, effects an alteration in the material worked upon which was intended from the outset. The process extinguishes itself in the product [*Produkt*]” (Marx 2002, 460).

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4 Reading this excerpt from *Capital*, the translation of the German word “Arbeit” with the English “work”—instead of “labor”—catches the eye. On this point, a terminological clarification is in place. In a footnote to the fourth German edition of *Capital* (Volume I), Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) proposes a terminological distinction between *work* and *labor*: “the English language has the advantage of possessing two separate words for these two different aspects of labor. Labor which creates use-values and is qualitatively determined is called ‘work’ as opposed to ‘labor’; labor which creates value and is only measured quantitatively is called ‘labor,’ as opposed to ‘work’” (Engels in Marx 2002, 2254, note 16). Nevertheless, as Ben Fowkes appropriately observes in his translation of *Capital*, “unfortunately, English usage does not always correspond to Engels’ distinction” (Fowkes in Marx 1990, 138).

In this chapter, I will use the term “labor” for two reasons: a) in line with Fowkes’ observations, I believe that Engels’ distinction is groundless from a linguistic point of view; b) Marx himself does not posit the concept of “purposeful activity” as a concrete particular process, but as a characteristic, a *moment* of a general process—i.e., the labor process—and, indeed, Marx affirms that the purposeful activity is *Arbeit selbst*, *labor itself*. Furthermore, most importantly Rossi-Landi argues that Marx’ idea of *zweckmäßige Tätigkeit* refers to a social human ability understood in its species-specific—therefore, *general/universal*—dimension.

According to Rossi-Landi, the presence of a purpose in the labor process demonstrates that labor takes place following a *program*, i.e., an *organized semiosis*. Actually, the *purpose* is “a conscious or unconscious, desired or endured, ‘mental’ anticipation of the product” (Rossi-Landi 1977, 40); namely, a *design* or a *project*. In my opinion, this latter assumption may refer to the fact that—according to Marx—labor is also *Vorstellung*, i.e., *representation*:<sup>5</sup> this means that labor process *includes labor itself* understood as a) the human ability of generating an “ideal anticipation” (Bellofiore and Redolfi-Riva 2015, 35, note 1)—or an *image*—of the product; and b) the human ability of *realizing* that representation. In this respect, it should be underlined that this representation differs from *what* the human being—understood with his/her *species-specific laboring ability*—has in front of him/her: the *Gegenstand*, i.e., the object, the material that will be transformed by labor.

In my opinion, the idea of labor as *Vorstellung* presents some similarities with that particular aspect of semiosis identified by Morris: i.e., the fact that, in virtue of semiosis, the interpreter “takes account of relevant properties of absent objects, or unobserved properties of objects which are present” (Morris 1938, 32). From such a perspective, *what a material can become*—i.e., the ideal anticipation or representation of the product—could be understood as *an unobserved property*

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5 This is the original German version of the excerpt in which Marx establishes a relation between *Arbeit* and *Vorstellung*: “Am Ende des Arbeitsprozesses kommt ein Resultat heraus, das beim Beginn desselben schon in der Vorstellung des Arbeiters, also schon ideell vorhanden war” (Marx 2002, 452). Ben Fowkes’ and Hans Ehrbar’s translations place “*Vorstellung*” near “*conception*”: “at the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been *conceived* by the worker [in der *Vorstellung* des Arbeiters] at the beginning, hence already existed *ideally* [Fowkes’ translation]/*notionally* [Ehrbar’s translation]” (Marx 1992, 284, and 2002, 452, emphasis added). Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling translate the same passage in a slightly different way, emphasizing the acceptance of “*imagination*”: “at the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the *imagination* of the *labourer* at its commencement” (Marx 1906, 198, emphasis added).

According to Ehrbar, “*Vorstellung*” can be rendered with “*conception*” understood as “a concept in the process of becoming” (Ehrbar 2010, 890); but the meaning of “*Vorstellung*” is specified in this excerpt by the proximity of the term “*ideell*”—which cannot be rendered with “*ideal*,” despite Fowkes’ translation—which means “*imagined, notional, as opposed to real*” (Ehrbar 2010, 890). In this sense, “*Vorstellung*” would encompass both the nuances of “*conception*” and “*imagination*.” A similar meaning is suggested by Riccardo Bellofiore and Tommaso Redolfi Riva who propose to understand “*Vorstellung*” as “a mental or notional representation: an ideal anticipation” (2015, 35, note 1). This acceptance seems to me pertinent with the semiotic perspective that I want to follow in this chapter; therefore, I have explicitly translated “*Vorstellung*” with “*representation*.” In support of this choice, consider the Italian translation by Roberto Fineschi, who coherently translates “in der *Vorstellung* des Arbeiters” with “*nella rappresentazione del lavoratore*” (Marx 2011, 198).

*of an object which is present*; in the same way, by working on a given object, the human being may become aware of *relevant properties of absent objects*; for example, the human/laborer can understand if the choice of a particular material is appropriate for realizing a certain product, or if a different—absent—material would be more suitable, or whether something should be changed in the *product design*, i.e., in the *representation* of the result of the labor process.

These considerations could be helpful to explain the convergence between *labor*, *semiosis* and *gesture*. By the term “gesture” Maddalena means “any performed act with a beginning and an end that carries a meaning (from *gero* = I bear, I carry on)” (2015, 70). From such a perspective a *meaning* has to be “pragmatically understood as the cluster of conceivable effects of an experience” (Maddalena 2015, 70). The gesture, therefore, is not a simple bodily articulation, but a *multimodal semiosis* constituting “the minimal unity of our synthetic reasoning” (Maddalena 2011, 6, my translation); that is, a reasoning in which “a never identical understanding of meanings is carried out; this understanding produces a development from the original vagueness to the generality of consequences through the concreteness of a time-limited event. It is an embodiment of vague meanings determined by the goal” (Maddalena 2014, 34, my translation); indeed, the goal or *telos*—or *Zweck*, as Marx would say—“is the embodied meaning itself” orienting the reasoning “from initial vagueness to meaningful generality through a singular event” (Maddalena 2015, 73)

The development from vagueness to generality can take place if the gesture is “complete,” that is, if it implies the three types of Sign theorized by Peirce: *Icon*, *Index*, and *Symbol*, which correspond—from a phenomenological point of view—to the categories of *Firstness*, *Secondness*, and *Thirdness*. From such a perspective, *labor* is a complete gesture encompassing these three semiotic/phenomenological modalities: a complete gesture implies a “teleological transformation of reality towards a goal (symbol), realized at a particular point (index) according to an infinite set of possibilities (icon)” (Maddalena 2011, 9, my translation).

### 3 *Phaneroscopy* and “*Anticipatory Consciousness*”

In the following sub-sections, I will frame the labor-semiosis connection in a parallel between Peirce and Bloch, illustrating their theoretical points of convergence. More specifically, I will illustrate how both authors consider the issue of *temporality* as strictly connected with the *gnoseological process*, that is with *experiential*, *practical* and *cognitive*—or, in one word, *experimental*—relation which human beings establish with matter. Particularly, I will illustrate how this rela-

tion originates a force field delimited by the concepts of “*possible*” and “*actual*.” The transition from one to the other of these poles takes place through the *subject’s* action: the subject can *design* the transformation of *what is external*—i.e., the *becoming* of matter; or, conversely, the subject can experience why what is external cannot be transformed, that is, the ways in which what is external opposes all its resistance.

The experience of *what is external* and the possibility of its transformation are inextricably linked with the issue of *temporality*. For Peirce, the *cognitive process* can be described through the phenomenological—or, as he would call it, “*phaneroscopic*”—analysis of the ways in which the subject experiences the *past*, the *present*, the *future*, and—consequently—the three categories of *Secondness*, *Firstness*, and *Thirdness*. More specifically, the cognitive process is configured as an attempt to *guess* the causes and effects of an unexpected event, trying to *anticipate* its *possible* developments in view of a given *purpose*. Homologically, in *Experimentum Mundi*, Bloch delineates the “cognitive relation” (Cunico 1980, 22, my translation) through a “phenomenological analysis of the ‘anticipatory consciousness’ [*das antizipierende Bewußtsein*]” (Cunico 1980, 20, my translation), i.e., through an analysis of the ways in which the subject seeks to *anticipate* the future, the “*possible*” contained in the present and the past of matter—i.e., to *anticipate* the “*possible*” of matter in order to *transform* the matter itself.

From a comparative reading of Peirce and Bloch’s arguments, the cognitive process can be read as a movement from the *vague* and *uncertain possibility* to a *complete gesture*—as defined by Maddalena—and, consequently, it is possible to posit a theoretical relation between *labor* and the act of *synthesis*—defined by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) as the operation that “collects the elements for cognitions and unifies them into a certain content” (Kant 2000, 211).

### 3.1 *Firstness* and “*Ordinary Present*” [*Übliche Gegenwart*]

Both Peirce and Bloch conceive the *present* as a dimension characterized by the *pure* and *vague possibility*. According to Peirce, *experience* “is the cognitive resultant of our past lives” (CP 2.84).<sup>6</sup> This cognitive resultant is independent from the will of the subject and—in fact—it cannot change at will. Therefore, what Peirce defines a *Binarity* or *Secondness* is the first category which is experienced by the subject—as experience deriving from the *Past*. Nevertheless, Peirce’s *Phaneroscopy* aims at analyzing the three categories as “indecomposable elements” (CP

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6 The acronym CP refers to the extended title *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*.

1.28), that is, at considering them in their *pure* dimension. So, in this sense, Firstness has to be logically understood as the initial category.

It is common knowledge that, according to Peirce, the present coincides with the category of *Firstness*, or *Quality*, that is, “a mere abstract potentiality” (CP 1.422) and the error of the nominalist and conceptualist approaches “lies in holding that the potential, or possible, is nothing but what the actual makes it to be” (CP 1.422). At the temporal level, this mere abstract potentiality coincides with the *absolute present*, i.e., with what would appear if “being in the present instant were it utterly cut off from past and future” (CP 2.85). Furthermore, “nothing is more occult than the absolute present” (CP 2.85). Nevertheless, Peirce also considers Firstness as characterized by a “myriad-fold variety” (CP 5.44);<sup>7</sup> indeed, in his writing a *On a New List of Categories* (1867), he defines this manifold character as “present, in general” (CP 1.547).

Bloch articulates his arguments in a similar way. First of all, Bloch also posits the multiple and undifferentiated dimension of the present as the starting point of the cognitive process. More specifically—in *Experimentum Mundi*—Bloch defines the “ordinary present [Übliche Gegenwart]” (Bloch 1975, 16, my translation) as the temporal dimension coinciding with the “multiple ‘something’ [das viele Etwas]” (Bloch 1975, 70, my translation). Furthermore, Bloch describes the present as a “blind spot [der blinde Fleck],” as the “obscurity of the lived moment [Das Dunkel des gerade gelebten Augenblick]” (1975, 15, my translation); an obscurity that recalls—in my view—the *occult* character of the absolute present as described by Peirce.

### 3.2 Secondness and “*Impetus*” [Anstoß]

Both Peirce and Bloch maintain that the factual dimension breaks into experience as a *shock*, as an *impact*. More specifically, according to Peirce, what is external—we could say, the matter or the external world—breaks into the subject experience as a “brute force” (CP 1.428), a *strike* or a *violent poke* which is independent on the subject will (see CP 5.45–5.47). In this way, the subject experiences the category of *Secondness*. As Peirce affirms, “we find secondness in occurrence, because an occurrence is something whose existence consists in our knocking up against it” (CP 1.358). The experience of an occurrence—the experience of *Secondness* understood as a “hard fact” (CP 1.358)—is experience of a “*fait accompli*” (CP 2.84),

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7 According to Proni, this *myriad-fold variety* constitutes the way in which Firstness manifests itself into the experience: that is, as a “Second Firstness” (Proni 1990, 200, my translation).

i.e., something that has already happened and cannot be changed. Therefore, as already said, *Secondness* is the first category to be experienced, in the form of experience from the *past*: “experience is *esse in praeterito*” (CP 2.84). Furthermore, *Secondness* breaks into experience in the form of “a series of surprise” (CP 5.51). According to Peirce, “it is by surprises that experience teaches all she deigns to teach us” (CP 5.51). That is, it is by surprise that the subject becomes aware of the reality of the external world and—we might say, *dialectically*—of one’s *otherness* in regard to this world. As Peirce says, surprise determines “a double consciousness at once of an *ego* and a *non-ego*, directly acting upon each other” (CP 5.52).

In my view, these Peirce’ arguments present some interesting homologies with *Experimentum Mundi*. Just like Peirce, Bloch places the *factual dimension*—identified with the undetermined *That* [*Daß*]<sup>8</sup>—as the starting point of his *phenomenology of anticipatory consciousness*. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Gerardo Cunico—the editor of the Italian version (1980) of *Experimentum Mundi*—explicitly translates “*Daß*” with the Italian expression “*il fatto-che*,” that is—in English—“the Fact-that.” In line with this interpretation, Wayne Hudson affirms: “the *That* is a categorical expression of *the fact that* something remains to be determined” (1982, 122, emphasis added).

However, just like Peirce, Bloch maintains that the factual dimension—namely, the “*That*”—presents itself as an “*impetus* [*Anstosß*] that occurs in the ‘now and here’”<sup>8</sup> but that “remains fluctuating even in the already occurred past” (Bloch 1975, 15, my translation). Furthermore, for Bloch also, the past experience is the dimension which determines the consciousness of an *ego* and a *non-ego*—as Peirce would say. Indeed, according to Bloch, the “*I*” [*Ich*] and the “*Something*” [*Etwas*] can only be “experienced [. . .] when their simple ‘now’ has passed and their simple ‘here’ is no longer one among many” (1975, 15, my translation). It is never possible to see “the current ‘now’ [*das jetzige Jetzt*], but only the ‘now’ that has just been [*das gerade gewesene Jetzt*], which properly is no longer such” (Bloch 1975, 14, my translation). A similar vision about the transience of the present is thematized by Peirce, when he affirms that “all that is immediately present to a man is what is in his mind in the present instant. His whole life is in the present. But when he asks what is the content of the present instant, his question always comes too late. The present has gone by, and what remains of it is greatly metamorphosed” (CP 1.309).

Interesting to note is also how—according to Peirce—*Binarity* or *Secondness* appears as *negation* and as *doubt*: “the very word ‘doubt,’ or ‘dubito,’ is the frequentative of ‘duhibeo’—i.e., *duo habeo*, and thus [the word itself] exhibits its binarity. If we did not struggle against doubt, we should not seek the truth” (CP

8 Cunico translates “*Anstosß*” with “*urto iniziale*” (Bloch 1980, 46), i.e., *initial impetus*.

2.84). Homologically, Bloch underlines how the initial impetus of the “That,” before finding “its determining content, [its] ‘What’ (Was)” (Cunico 1980, 12, my translation), presents itself as “question [*Frage*]” (Bloch 1975, 73, my translation). As Cunico observes, the “That” is posited by Bloch as “the radical and constitutive negativity of immediate being” (Cunico 1980, 12, my translation).

### 3.3 Thirdness, “Guess,” and *Anticipatory Consciousness*

As we know, according to Peirce, *Thirdness* coincides with “being in future” (CP 2.86). *Being in future* “appears in mental forms, intentions and expectations” (CP 2.86). Starting from this assumption, it should be stated that, according to Peirce, the cognitive process is articulated through a tension between *expectations*—crystallized in *laws*—and *surprises*. As already said, Peirce describes *surprise* as an intrusion of an unexpected fact into the world of expectations. In this regard, Peirce observes that “nothing can possibly be learned from an experiment that turns out just as was anticipated” (CP 5.51). Moreover, “it is by surprises that experience teaches all she deigns to teach us” (CP 5.51). On the other hand, knowledge drives from the attempt to guess what is—or seems—*unpredictable* and to delineate its laws through experiments; actually, Peirce himself underlines that we construct our knowledge of natural laws proceeding “by experimentation. That is to say, we guess out the laws bit by bit” (CP 2.86). Moreover, “all our knowledge of the laws of nature is analogous to knowledge of the future, inasmuch as there is no direct way in which the laws can become known to us” (CP 2.86).

The fact that direct knowledge of the future is impossible implies the need for “a machinery, a medium”: this medium is “*intention*, the mind’s action” (CP 2.86). Intention poses the “final causes, or ends” and, in this way, future can “*influence*” the present (CP 2.86, emphasis added). From such a perspective, the experiment can be understood as a procedure aimed at confirming or confuting certain expectations. It is through the *imagination*—the hypothetical anticipation—of a possible, uncertain outcome that the future influences the present. In my view, homologous theses can be found in *Experimentum Mundi*.

As already mentioned, according to Bloch, the factual dimension—the “*Daß*”—presents itself as *radical negativity*: the “That” contains a “not” which designates its processual dimension. The dynamic character of the “*Daß*”—that is, the matter to be experienced and known—derives from a force that is “not [. . .] only hidden, but also driving [*treibende*]” (Bloch 1975, 21, my translation). This hidden and driving force determines the “*Daß*” as a “*not-yet [Noch-Nicht]*” (Bloch 1975, 15, my translation). And this *not-yet being* clearly refers to the temporal dimension of the *future*.

However, future can be experienced in a contradictory way; and, in this regard, Bloch distinguishes between an *ungenuine future* [*unechter Zukunft*] and a *genuine future* [*echter Zukunft*]. In my view, the tension between these two concepts could be compared with the tension outlined by Peirce when he refers to the relationship between expectations and surprises. The ungenuine future “comes forth, as it were, in a schematic way” (Bloch 1975, 90, my translation): “in the ungenuine future we are expected every night to see the regular bedroom, every business that is repeated every morning, as well as the rising and setting of the sun, and other such things” (Bloch 1975, my translation). It is a future that can be defined through “a sum of repetitions gathered under a law” and characterized by a *mechanism* that “only understands what can be expected, the repetition of what has always occurred” (Bloch 1975, 126, my translation). A future that is “so repeated that it can be expected with certainty” (Bloch 1975, 126, my translation); in short, it is a future “bended under the past, indeed it represents the past itself with the mere chronological index of posteriority” (Bloch 1975, 91, my translation). This mechanism cannot grasp the dynamic character of the “*Daß*” and this kind of future cannot correspond to its *not-yet being*—least of all exhaust it. On the contrary, the *genuine future* implies both the awareness of the *tendencies* of what appear in front of us, and the awareness of “the element of *surprise* [*das Element der Überraschung*]” (Bloch 1975, 90, emphasis added, my translation): that is, the fact that something *new* can *appear* in laws and tendencies. This brings us to a fundamental theme of Bloch’s theory: the genuine future can only appear through the *gesture* of “*Fortbilden*.” Analyzing this concept, my aim in the next section is to demonstrate that an idea of “complete gesture” can be detected in Bloch’s dialectics as well.

## 4 Complete Gesture and “*Imagining-Forth*” [*Fortbilden*]

Gerardo Cunico translates the German verb “*Fortbilden*” with the Italian expression “*ultra-figurare*”; a possible English translation can be “to imagine forth.” According to Cunico, the verb *Fortbilden* designates the possibility of a *mediated knowledge* (see Cunico 1980, 58, note 16): that is, a *creative knowledge* which overcomes any form of “absolute representation and reproduction” (Cunico 1980, 58, note 16, my translation).

From such a perspective, the act of *imagining-forth* consists in the possibility of foreseeing, of discovering the hidden, *latent element* in an already outlined *tendency*—in order to understanding the development of that tendency. According to Bloch, *Latency* anticipates the *Tendency* direction: Tendency pre-exists in the

form of Latency. This relation between *Latency* and *Tendency*—according to Gerardo Cunico—is explained by the prefix “*fort*”: indeed, “the prefix *fort* indicates precisely this going beyond, this anticipating without going over the real, but taking it with us” (Cunico 1980, 58, note 16, my translation).

However, it is interesting to note that in his 2009 essay on Bloch, Mauro Farnesi Camellone explicitly uses the word “gesture” to refer to the concept of “*Fortbilden*”: actually, he talks about the “*gesto dell’ultra-figurazione*” (Farnesi Camellone 2009, 53)—i.e., “the gesture of imagining-forth.” In my opinion, the concept of “gesture” properly designates the act of imagining-forth. Indeed, I believe that it is possible to affirm that Bloch describes the process of *imagining-forth* by three gestural modes: *Rotating* [*Drehen*], *Bringing-out* [*Herausbringen*] and *Lifting* [*Heben*]. Through these three gestures, the practical activity of the subject mediates the *possible latency* of matter, *aiming* at its *actualization*. The hidden, *latent element* in the tendency cannot emerge without an *anticipatory* and *goal-oriented manipulation* of matter, an *anticipatory* and *goal-oriented manipulation* of the external world. This consideration further clarifies how Bloch’s dialectical theory presents some convergences with Maddalena’s pragmatist interpretation of labor as complete gesture: indeed, as we have seen, *labor* can be considered as a complete gesture because it implies a “teleological transformation of reality towards a goal (symbol), realized at a particular point (index) according to an infinite set of possibilities (icon)” (Maddalena 2011, 9, my translation).

By positing “an *analogon* of human peculiar activity, especially labor” (Bloch 1975, 116, my translation), Bloch uses these three gestures as metaphors for operations of knowing and thinking. The thinking-subject does the same as the laboring-subject: operating on an equally “heavy” matter, the subject rotates, takes out and lifts from the indistinct manifold what can satisfy his/her needs, no matter “whether they arise [. . .] from the stomach or from the imagination” (Marx 2002, 45).

Important to underline is that Bloch does not simply refer to these modes—or actions—as mere body articulations. As I mentioned in the abstract, Bloch seems to affirm that knowledge—and possibly, the transformation of matter—involves a homological—we may say, *synthetic*—relationship between the *gaze*—as Silvano Petrosino would say, “the theoretical sense ‘par excellence’” (Petrosino 2004, 25, my translation)—and the *hand*. As Bloch says, “no mediation is possible if we do not leave the immediate proximity of the simple impression. That is, if the *gaze* does not act like a *hand* which keeps the thing at a distance, which keeps

it in front of the eyes” (Bloch 1975, 14, emphasis added, my translation).<sup>9</sup> *Mediation* is possible if the gaze “distances itself a little from the immediacy of the thing” (Bloch 1975, 14, my translation).

For Bloch, the cognitive process starts with the gesture of *rotating* [*Drehen*]. And this rotation takes place *in* the gaze. The rotation in gaze interposes an initial mediation between the subject and the multiple, undifferentiated, *Daß*: “we do not see what we experience. What must be seen must be rotated [*gedreht*] in front of us. Only in this way we can keep it in front of us without remaining ourselves immediate” (Bloch 1975, 13, my translation). This rotation allows a first determination of the *Daß*: namely, the *Daß* can now be determined as *Etwas*—that is, as *Something*.

However, rotation—according to Bloch—contains a further gesture: the *bringing-out* [*herausbringen*]; “what” has been rotated must be brought out of immediacy in order to be “experienced [*Erlebt*]” (Bloch 1975, 13, my translation). The synthesis of these two gestures is the *rotating-out* [*herausdrehen*]. *This rotation towards the “outside”* [*Die Drehung aus*] coincides with what Bloch calls *Ergriff*—i.e., *prehension*. Prehension is—according to Bloch—“the first logical operation [. . .] by which something still indeterminate—but tending to clarify itself as something distinct—is detached from the vague emotionality of the factual and the experienced” (Cunico 1980, 73, note 27, my translation). This detachment happens when a completely indeterminate “some” [*Irgend*] attracts the *logical attention* [*ein logisch aufmerken*] of the subject. Prehension is the operation through which the “Some” can be defined as “an indeterminate, empty *Es* [*It*] about which something can be enunciated” (Bloch 1975, 39, my translation); more specifically, prehension coincides with the indeterminacy “to be determined” (Bloch 1975, 39, my translation) which is contained in every logical subject—that is, in every *Es*. The logical subject

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<sup>9</sup> In this regard, it is interesting to notice that the analogy between hand-movement and cognition is used in vector calculus: it is the case of the so called *right-hand rule*. This convention is a mnemonic device for visualizing the orientation of axes in three-dimensional space; more specifically, the right-hand rule establishes that three fingers of a right hand can constitute a three-dimensional space circumscribed by the x axis (corresponding to the thumb), the y axis (corresponding to the index finger) and the z (corresponding to the medium finger). Apropos, it is interesting to underline that the computer-aided design software AutoCAD includes a function based on the *right-hand rule*. This function is used to imagine the orientation and rotation of a certain three-dimensional object; the rotation is used—for example—to check the correct design of that object. Considering this rule, the user can employ the software interface a) to reproduce a three-dimensional space circumscribed by his/her hand; b) to inscribe certain object in that space; c) to rotate the hand in order to observe the different faces of the object. From such a perspective, the rotation-gesture is assumed as an instrument of knowledge to experience certain objects also when a certain work is performed in the field of information technology.

can be determined only through predication, that is, when “by means of the copula, the subject to be determined is connected with the determining predicate” (Bloch 1975, 39, my translation).

I believe that Peirce’s theory presents homologous arguments. In *On a New List*, for example, the concept of “attention” designates the “faculty that directs the mind to an object” (CP 1.547). Moreover, attention is the faculty that “works”<sup>10</sup> (Proni 1990, 78, my translation) on the “manifold of sensuous impressions” (CP 1.547)—i.e., on the *present in general*—recognizing an “IT” (CP 1.547, capital letters). Nevertheless, the IT “contained in attention, has no connotation, and therefore no proper unity” (CP 1.547). Furthermore, Peirce—just like Bloch—considers that “the *it* cannot itself be made a predicate. This *it* is thus neither predicated of a subject, nor in a subject” (CP 1.547). Only the copula can be the “junction of predicate to subject,” completing “the work of conceptions of reducing the manifold to unity” (CP 1.548). In this way, it seems possible to affirm that Peirce and Bloch maintain that predication presupposes *attention*. Moreover, both authors theorize a kind of *pre-subjectivity* (IT or Es) which remains undetermined until the attribution of a predicate. Therefore, Peirce’s IT and Bloch’s *Es* can be understood as a *subject to be determined*.

Bloch uses the gestural metaphor of “rotating-out” to explain how attention and prehension operate on the “multiple ‘something’ [*vielen Etwas*]” (Bloch 1975, 70, my translation) which coincides with the *ordinary present*. Proni seems to find a similar metaphor also in Peirce’s thought; particularly, *attention* can be understood as “the faculty or principle which, as Michelangelo Buonarroti would say, ‘per forza di levare’ [*by the action of bringing away*] ‘removes’ the first nucleus of impressions from the sensuous manifold” (Proni 1990, 78, my translation). These considerations by Proni can be linked to Maddalena’s analysis of the connection between complete gesture and labor.

As we have seen, according to Maddalena, *labor* can be considered as a complete gesture because it implies a “teleological transformation of reality towards a goal (symbol), realized at a particular point (index) according to an infinite set of possibilities (icon)” (Maddalena 2011, 9, my translation). In this perspective, Maddalena’s arguments might highlight further points of convergence between Peirce and Bloch. More specifically, I believe that Bloch’s theory of knowledge exactly

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<sup>10</sup> Interesting to note is how, in his analysis of the fundamental elements of the labor process, Marx connects *attention* [*Aufmerksamkeit*] to the concept of “purposeful will [*zweckmäßige wille*]” (2002, 452): “Apart from the exertion of his organs, a purposeful will is required for the entire duration of the labour process, which manifests itself as the worker’s attention [*Aufmerksamkeit*]” (2002, 452).

describes this process which starts from original vagueness and arrives at the generality of consequences through the concreteness of a singular event.

Such theoretical convergence can be identified in how Bloch structures the relation between the “Possibility” and the “subjective factor of will [*der subjektive Willensfaktor*]” (Bloch 1975, 128, my translation). Bloch structures his category of “Possibility” [*Möglichkeit*] by taking up the dual Aristotelian formulation of “possible” as *δυνάμει ὄν* [*dynamei on*] and as *κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν* [*kata to dynaton*]: 1) the first meaning defines the “being-in-possibility [*In-Möglichkeit-Sein*]” (Bloch 1975, 139, my translation); namely, *what-is-in-possibility*: a possibility which is contained in the matter, a possibility not concretely realized but concretely existing. 2) The second meaning defines the “being-according-to-possibility [*Maßgabe des Möglichkeit*]” (Bloch 1975, 139, my translation); namely, *what-is-according-to-possibility*. In this case, possibility—as Cunico affirms—coincides with “the locus of the concrete partial conditions of realisation, the historical limit and framework, the contingent and changing measure of what is ‘from time to time’ possible” (Cunico 1980, 14, my translation).

The *subjective factor of will* is the element which can realize the possibility of matter; the *subjective factor* is the *power* [*Potenz*] that *rotates out* the objective *potentiality of matter* [*Potentialität*], i.e., the *objective factor*. The subjective factor transforms matter according to its potentiality. Therefore, this *subjective intervention* is nothing more than an attempt to *anticipate* the latent element in the possibility and regularity of matter; more specifically, the *Anticipation* [*Antizipation*] is the desire of rotating out the latent and utopian element of matter, the possible “good future [*die guten Heraufkunft*]” (Cunico 1980, 67, my translation) of the world. The liberation of this *utopian possibility*—through the mediating intervention of anticipatory praxis—coincides with Bloch’s third gestural modality: *lifting* [*Heben*]. According to Bloch, “everything that is no longer immediate coincides with this being *lifted up* [*Heraufgehobensein*]” (Cunico 1980, 14, my translation). It is the mediating action of gesture that allows matter to bring to light its possible-real, its utopian potential. In Bloch’s theory, this—we may say, *complete*—gesture coincides with the three categories of rotating, bringing out, and lifting.

According to Cunico, Bloch outlines the matter as a “mater gestante e par-toriente” (Cunico 1980, 14), that is as a *pregnant and parturient mother*. Indeed, according to Bloch, the knowledge process starts from the multiple and undifferentiated present. In that moment, the matter coincide with “the obscurity of the moment lived before the future” (Bloch 1980, 127, my translation). Thanks to the anticipatory praxis of the human being, matter “throws itself into the future

[*in die Zukunft einschießt*],” like a mother who “unburdens her womb [*Ausgebürung seines Schoßes*]” (Bloch 1980, 91, my translation).<sup>11</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

To conclude, starting from this latter image depicted by Bloch, I believe a continuum can be identified between two different acceptations of the Latin verb “*gerere*,” understood in its generic meaning of “to carry” (as also pointed out by Maddalena). The first acceptation coincides with the intensive verb “*gestare*,” “to carry somebody within ourselves”; the Italian words “*gestante*”—i.e., *pregnant*—and “*gestazione*”—in English, *gestation*—derive exactly from this intensive form of “*gero*.” The second acceptations coincides with the word “*gestus*,” understood not only as “gesture,” “*gesticulation*,” but also as “movement.” This is the root of the Italian verb “*gestire*” understood not only as “*gesticulate*,” but also—and above all—as “*govern*,” “*administer*,” “*manage*”—from Latin “*manu agere*,” i.e., to lead by (a gesture of) the hand, and—extensively—to “carry out” an action according to a purpose. We could say: “knowing how to transform by being aware of the goal.” It is therefore the “gesture” that *brings-out*, that *brings to light* what is “*gestating*,” the possible “not-yet being” of matter.

In the light of these argumentations, it could be hypothesized that the three gestural modalities of rotating, bringing out and lifting summarize the *iconic imagination* of the possibilities contained in matter, the *indicative* character of subjective intervention and the *symbolicity* of anticipatory practice, understood as detection of latency in the tendency.

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<sup>11</sup> In this regard, it is interesting to recall that—in a letter to Peirce dated November 20, 1904—Victoria Lady Welby (1837–1912) proposed a parallelism between the experience of childbirth and the category of *Thirdness*, understood as projection into the future. More generally, Welby proposed to read the Peircean categories in the light of the racial *mother-experience*. For more on this topic, see Petrilli (2009 and 2014).

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