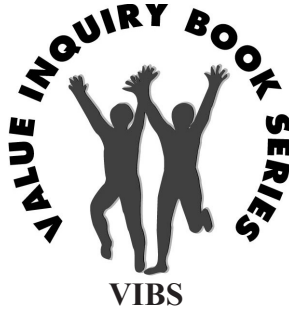


PRACTICING PRAGMATIST AESTHETICS



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WRITING AS COMPLETE GESTURE: A PRAGMATIST VIEW OF CREATIVITY

Giovanni Maddalena

I

Introduction

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien used to say that the entire saga of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* was born from writing the sentence “In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit,” without knowing what a hobbit should have been.¹ The observation is far from being trivial. Euler maintained the same when he said that the entire power of his mathematics lived in his pencil.² Peirce’s and Wittgenstein’s notes on “doing mathematics” as the foundation of mathematics are not far away from these statements.³ Many contemporary mathematicians seem to hold a similar perspective, accepting that the creative part of mathematics is made by “gestures.”⁴

Connecting doing and thinking in a perfect kind of continuity is characteristic of pragmatism, in all its stripes. From the pragmatic maxim onward, pragmatists stressed the importance of a kind of reasoning that would broaden knowledge in a synthetic way. In order to represent a real way of reasoning within this continuous path, classic pragmatists forged rational tools. Peirce’s abduction and Dewey’s logic of inquiry are perhaps a couple of the most important and most useful methods of reasoning that they pointed out. They show pragmatists’ attempt to work out a different rational paradigm that would respect the continuity of experience. They tried to avoid any abstract distinction or division and allowed for a more “ampliative” way of thinking (i.e. one that broadens our knowledge). Their tools show that pragmatism is alien both to any form of static Platonic essentialism and to many attempts to reduce knowledge to analysis or verificationism. However, their tools remain an analytic way to approach synthetic reasoning, while they never realized that their researches pointed toward a complete synthetic pattern, where synthesis is achieved through synthetic tools.

A completely synthetic tool should be a completely embodied way of reasoning in our everyday way of thinking. This paper will try to find this synthetic tool through the effective example of literature. As a matter of fact, art has always been the field in which pragmatists showed this need for syntheticity. I find the same need for a different definition and use of synthetic judgment in two of the most important pragmatist aesthetics of the last

decades: Margolis's⁵ and Shusterman's,⁶ both of whom summon Dewey's aesthetics to show that art can be a synthetic tool of knowledge. However, neither of them finds a sufficient technical explanation of the way in which art can achieve that.

Relying on Peirce's semiotic and on the example of Vasily Grossman as an author, this paper will show why and how writing is a synthetic tool of knowledge that we can call "gesture" and that explains creativity in a pragmatist pattern. It will then explain why and how this gesture, when it is a "complete" one, fosters knowledge much more than any analysis, including the author's analytic knowledge of his creativity.

II

Vasily Grossman is one of the most important and less well known masters of writing of the twentieth century. Born in 1905, he grew up in a Jewish family but was completely absorbed in communist multicultural revolutionary ideas. At quite a young age he became a well-respected, integrated writer of the regime, thanks to Gorky's approval of his short stories.⁷

During the Second World War, Grossman became nationally famous. He lost his mother in the first Nazi attack. She was executed as thousands of Jews had been, in Grossman's home town, Berdichev (Ukraine). Somehow feeling guilty for not having gone quickly enough to rescue his mother and summon her up to Moscow, Grossman enrolled in the Red Army where he was soon chosen as reporter for the *Red Star*, the newspaper of the Army. Following the troops, Grossman fought at Stalingrad, where he did his work courageously on the right bank (while party members fled to the safe left bank) where the German and Soviet armies clashed.

After the war, he started working on a big novel representing the Battle of Stalingrad. The first part of the novel, *For a Just Cause*, was published only in 1952, and only Stalin's death prevented major and potentially very dangerous critiques from appearing in official newspapers. Such critiques were the outcome of the growing anti-Semitism of Stalin's regime even though the novel was following the rhetorical truths and patterns of Soviet literature. In the 1950s Grossman worked on the second part of the novel, in which he changed his perspective. He decided to tell the whole truth at any cost. The cost was high. The manuscript of *Life and Fate* was seized by the KGB (1961) and Grossman's complaints to the authorities remained unheard. Grossman died a few years later (1964), abandoned by the majority of his friends and without the permission to publish anymore. A copy of his masterpiece was smuggled to Western countries only in 1978 and was published in 1980 in Switzerland. Only in recent years has Grossman become widely popular.⁸

This brief biographical sketch is necessary to understanding the first step of this paper: writing is a gesture by which we know something in a synthetic

way. In order to explain what a “gesture” is, let us take a meaningful example from Grossman’s *Life and Fate*. In Chapter 14 of the second part, the commandant of a Nazi *Lager*, Liss, summons an old Soviet prisoner, Mostovskoy. This latter had been one of the first Bolsheviks, Lenin’s comrade, one of the main characters of the Revolution. Liss does not want to interrogate the old communist. He wants to make him listen to his own well-pondered theory about the absolute equivalence of the Nazi and Soviet systems. The scene starts as an interrogation but reveals itself to be a strange sort of dialogue.

‘I’ve been summoned for interrogation,’ he [Mostovskoy] said out loud. ‘There’s nothing for us to talk about.’
 ‘Why do you say that?’ asked Liss. ‘All you see is my uniform. But I wasn’t born in it. The Führer and the Party command; the rank and file obey. I was a theoretician. I’m a Party member, but my real interest lies in questions of history and philosophy. Surely not all the officers in your NKVD loved the Lubyanka?’

...

‘When we look one another in the face, we’re neither of us just looking at a face we hate—no, we’re gazing into a mirror. That’s the tragedy of our age. Do you really not recognize yourselves in us—yourselves and the strength of your will? Isn’t it true that for you too the world *is* your will? Is there anything that can make *you* waver?’⁹

“We are gazing into a mirror” is Grossman’s conclusion. Today this historical statement seems almost trivial, even though it is not universally accepted. However, it was not trivial at all in 1961 when this similarity was rarely affirmed in the Western world, and never in the Soviet Union.¹⁰ In this case, literature represented an inconvenient truth; it showed this sad equivalence well before it was known to historians in its particulars, and to philosophers in its reasons.

Literature shows a comprehending power through its representation. What is the dynamic of such a process of knowledge? How is it connected to creativity? In what sense is it a pragmatist way to look at knowledge?

In pragmatist terms we could say that Grossman had *an* experience of this political reality. He fought at Stalingrad and he saw the atrocities perpetrated by both armies. Even more, he realized on that occasion how on both sides soldiers were caught up by ideologies through Party control. As a matter of fact, Grossman’s novel shows that soldiers in both camps become more human when they lose contact with their parties, in the moment in which they are losing the battle. Germans and Soviets experience the same path of rescue from ideologies. When one has an experience like this one, a powerful experience for which there is no previous pattern of understanding (at that

time ideology was not studied as it is now and it was harder to understand its mechanisms), the synthetic path of knowledge emerges more clearly than usually. This path is semiotically constituted.

Avoiding any overly technical explanation, let us sum up this fundamental pragmatist conception. According to Peirce, semiosis is the process by which we transform the multiplicity of data into unity through quality, relation, and representation.¹¹ In a later text, semiosis is the dynamic of the relationship among object, representamen (sign in itself), and interpretant.¹² Both formulas express the profound and new realism that informed many pragmatist views: experience becomes intelligible through signs that generate comprehension in the form of other signs. In this way pragmatists account for both realism and the construction of interpretation: knowledge is not a plain copy but an interpretation. However, interpretation is not the fruit of some arbitrary construction but the outcome of a process of reality of which interpreters (human or not) as well as the instruments of knowledge themselves are parts. Reality evolves also in a semiotic way which we belong to and with which we cooperate.

In Peirce's complex classification of signs (56,049 different kinds), a triad appears as the most important: icons, indices, and symbols, the three kinds that link representamen and dynamic object. Icons are those kinds of signs that represent the object by similarity, while indices represent it by brute connection, and symbols by interpretation (i.e., images of any kind are icons, signals are indices, words are symbols). In turn, this classification reflects phenomenological relations that Peirce called Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness in order to express the relation with oneself, with another one, and with a plurality. Any form of reality displays this phenomenological pattern.

Now, an accomplished knowledge can be summarized by words, that is, at a symbolic level. New and difficult situations like the Battle of Stalingrad and the clash of ideologies were too powerful and too unknown to be already well-formed and ready for analysis. A communist writer was facing both the strength and the falsity of his maternal culture. His world was collapsing before him. In technical terms, experiences like this one are still vague and need comprehension. As we have seen, the process of representing and comprehending are one thing for pragmatists of Peirce's stripe (and in general, with different nuances, for all classic pragmatists), so much so that any comprehension, that is, any semiosis, is somehow a creative process, if we understand creativity in a broad sense. Grossman, like any artist, displays this ordinary semiotic pattern at a more visible level: he actually has to employ different levels of signs at the same time in order to represent (or to comprehend) experience. He has to give an iconic-indexical-symbolic form to the object (the experience) he wants to represent. This "giving form" happens on both a phenomenological and a semiotic level.

On the phenomenological level, the experience is an indeterminate form, what we call a 'vague idea' in ordinary language. It is the level of *firstness*, of

the idea in itself. When the author starts writing it becomes effective (*secondness*) in the action of the actual scribing. Material or virtual writing modifies the idea, making it existent. This is why we have the impression that the actual writing is the source of thought itself. Finally, a complete picture of the situation, with characters and dialogues, emerges while we are writing. The complete displaying of the form of experience is a *thirdness*, a relationship among experience and the signs of its interpretation. Thirdness is the new reality formed from both the initial experience and its semiotic development. It is a new form of reality, independent of what any thinker, or even the majority of thinkers, can understand or say. The dialogue between Liss and Mostovskoy is a reality: it provokes effects and it is independent of any opinion.

On the semiotic level, the idea takes the shape of images, that is, icons: images are the set-up of the scene in the *Lager* and the actions that the characters perform from the initial description of Liss' physical aspect to the final movement with which Mostovskoy grasps the manuscript that Liss entrusts to him.¹³ Proper names are indices, connecting characters and geophysical entities. Liss and Mostovskoy are obviously the first two proper names that bring the situation alive, but there are many: Stalin, Hitler, NKVD, Lubyanka, etc. Nicknames or epitomes like "the Führer," "our chief," and so on are also indices. Finally, the discourse itself is a symbol that proceeds through words and that develops a meaning toward which the scene tends.

In a sense the semiotic analysis can be much more complicated. To be thorough it should say that icons and indices are expressed by symbols (words) anyway so that we could talk of pure symbols and degenerate symbols of different kinds (which contain indices and icons, only indices, or only icons). However, at this point we are interested not in this kind of analysis because we wanted only to cast light on what happens in the representation of experience through writing, so that we can limit ourselves to the basic analysis that we mentioned. For the purpose of this paper, it is important that when the action of representing involves both the phenomenological and semiotic levels in all their main distinctions, we have a "gesture." What is a "gesture"? An action can be only a reaction. But every action that bears a meaning—as the pragmatic rule says—is a "gesture" (from the latin *gero* = I bear, I carry on). Our lives are full of meaningful actions in love, religion, work, science, and death. Public and private rites are usually gestures, but also scientific inquiry, family relationships, and social gatherings have their own characteristic gestures. The double phenomenological and semiotic pattern defines why some actions are such a powerful tool of comprehension. Writing, and especially creative writing, is one of them.

Following Peirce's semiotic indications, we can say that when a "gesture" blends all the kinds of signs together in "equal" proportion, we have a "complete gesture." Any creative act broadly understood in the many fields we have mentioned is a "gesture." But a gesture can be incomplete, as are our ordinary way of understanding through semiosis and our ordinary actions. A

creative act like “artistic writing” is a “complete gesture,” that is, a “gesture” that blends together signs in a certain intentional and equal way. We cannot go here into the complex theme of awareness and its normative implications,¹⁴ but we will stick to the semiotic form and implication of a “complete gesture.”

III

What does an “equal blending” of signs mean? What kind of knowledge does it permit? Once again we will start with examples taken from Grossman’s masterpiece. Grossman’s main concept is the nature and dynamic of freedom as opposed to ideology. With Grossman we find a theoretical explanation of what freedom is. The manuscript that Mostovskoy receives from Liss has been written by Ikonnikov, a “fool of God” who is prisoner in the camp. As a “fool,” Ikonnikov is allowed to tell the truth, according to an ancient literary tradition. The truth is that any form of Good is ideological. In the name of the Good, so many atrocities have been committed that one would have to be blind not to see that any theorization of the Good becomes evil and violent. Moreover, through Ikonnikov Grossman indicates that this Evil is not only on the human level. Beasts and even trees fight one another in order to survive. Evil seems to cover the entire development of any living being, even though Grossman observes all the way through the book that living in itself is the only Good and the only meaning we can attribute to the words Freedom and Life. This double conviction is paradoxical: life is good and free, but the development of life and its unavoidable death is evil and slavish. Ikonnikov’s solution is that the Good is opposed to kindness. Kindness is the practical, illogical, little attitude that common people show to one another outside any theoretical consideration.

These are Grossman’s theoretical statements. Paradoxical as they are, the only way in which the author can express them is by representing them through gestures. And gestures must be complete in order to reach meaningfulness. Even in Ikonnikov’s text, this illogical goodness has to be shown by examples made of gestures, so much so that Ikonnikov’s manuscript tells the story of an old Russian woman whose husband has been shot by Nazi occupiers. Eventually she will help the German soldier who is accidentally wounded at her apartment. How so? For no reason. Illogical, silly, practical kindness: this is the only reflex of the original freedom of life.

This senseless kindness is condemned in the fable about the pilgrim who warmed a snake in his bosom. It is kindness that has mercy on a tarantula that bitten a child. A mad, blind, kindness. People enjoy looking in stories and fables for examples of the danger of this senseless kindness. But one shouldn’t be afraid of it. One might just as well be afraid of a freshwater fish carried out by chance into the salty ocean.

The harm from time to time occasioned a society, class, race or State by this senseless kindness fades away in the light that emanates from those who are endowed with it.

This kindness, this stupid kindness, is what is most truly human in a human being. It is what sets man apart, the highest achievement of his soul. No, it says, life is not evil!

This kindness is both senseless and wordless. It is instinctive, blind. When Christianity clothed it in the teachings of the Church Fathers, it began to fade; its kernel became a husk. It remains potent only while it is dumb and senseless, hidden in the living darkness of the human heart.¹⁵

However, this theoretical discourse with its examples is not Grossman's best representation of his idea.

In Chapter 48 of the second part Sofya Osipovna is a Russian doctor. She is taken prisoner at Stalingrad. During the long journey by train, she becomes acquainted with a young orphan, David. The train takes them to Treblinka. Once off the train, she has the opportunity to escape the gas chamber by declaring her status as a doctor. However, she decides to stay with the child who is already affectionate towards her. Their painful journey terminates in the gas chamber. Here Grossman has to represent one of the crudest experiences of humanity: "Speech was no longer of any use to people, nor was action; action is directed towards the future and there no longer was any future."¹⁶ The symbolic level is here declared insufficient.

Sofya Levinton felt the boy's body subside in her arms. Once again she had fallen behind him. In mine-shafts where the air becomes poisoned, it is always the little creatures, the birds and mice, that die first. This boy, with his slight, bird-like body, had left before her.

'I've become a mother,' she thought.

That was her last thought.

Her heart, however, still had life in it: it contracted, ached and felt pity for all of you, both living and dead; Sofya Osipovna felt a wave of nausea. She pressed David, now a doll, to herself; she became dead, a doll.¹⁷

Grossman's theoretical statements about kindness are presented through a "gesture" here. Taking for granted the phenomenological analysis of the gesture by the author, let us concentrate on the semiotic level of the scene. Everything is described by words, that is, by symbols, but words are declared impotent to describe what is going on. Thus words have to work not at a conceptual level but at the iconic and indexical levels. Indices are decisive here, in order to recapitulate what Sofya's and David's lives were.

Her eyes—which had read Homer, *Izvestia*, *Huckleberry Finn* and Mayne Reid, that had looked at good people and bad people, that had

seen the geese in the green meadows of Kursk, the stars above the observatory at Pulkovo, the glitter of surgical steel, the *Mona Lisa* in the Louvre, tomatoes, and turnips in the bins at market, the blue water of Issyk-Kul—her eyes were no longer of any use to her. If someone had blinded her, she would have felt no sense of loss.¹⁸

David's memories are not strictly indexical, but by use of a list an indexical value emerges—common names are used as labels more than descriptions:

He had taken only few steps in the world. He had seen the prints of children's bare heels on hot, dusty earth, his mother lived in Moscow, the moon looked down and people's eyes looked up at it from below, a teapot was boiling on the gas-ring ... This world, where a chicken could run without its head, where there was milk in the morning and frogs he could get to dance by holding their front feet—this world still preoccupied him.

All this time David was being clasped by strong warm hands. He didn't feel his eyes go dark, his heart become empty, his mind grow dull and blind. He had been killed. He no longer existed.¹⁹

The strong, last hug is the iconic image that sums up the entire, ineffable feeling of that old lady for the young son of her people: the profound unity, the unutterable piety, the rage against the enemy, and the deep unanswered questions of the utility of her life. But that hug opens up the last (symbolic) thought: I am a mother. From the ultimate border of the evil stems the greatest answer to her eternal questions.

At a semiotic level, all three kinds of signs are present in a much more artistically convincing way than the short description of the old Soviet woman in Ikonnikov's manuscript. Cleverly, symbols as such (words) are said to be silent in a scene of death. However, the scene is described through words and, at the end, it is a word that expresses a well-formed thought about being a mother, the real meaning of the story. Indices are used to recapitulate existence, playing on their power to label existent experiences. Icons describe the movements in the gas chamber: those movements represent the emptiness of insensate death as well as the deep meaning of that last hug. Everything keeps together in a proportion that we could judge so equal as to perform a "complete gesture."

Now, let us go back to our questions: what does an "equal blending" of signs mean? What kind of knowledge does it permit? "Equal blending" means that this action has elements of originality insofar as it represents the forms of the experience from which it stems (iconic level); it has an actual determination in existence (index); and it has a scope (symbol), a final destination which is the ideal end that the single realization has to confirm and which will verify the goodness or the plausibility of the act itself.

So far I have not determined how “equal” can be measured in a positive way. However, we know what it means in a negative way. We know that when the iconic reading of forms is weak, there is no variation, thus there is no novelty or passion. When indices are weak, there are mere repetitions. And finally, when symbols are weak, acts become incomprehensible.

In Ikonnikov’s manuscript icons are weak so that we face the typical tone of theoretical statements. They are still creative in a way since they are forms of artistic writing as well, but they lack the power and the novelty with which icons describe the process of understanding that is going on in experience. Theory is already settled. Indices grant the connection with hard existence. If we imagined Sofya’s scene without indices, we would not understand the richness of the persons that we are losing in the gas chamber, because the lists of memories make us comprehend who they were. Without symbols, the final revelation of the episode would be lost and death would only remain a monstrosity.

From these semiotic characteristics, the answer to the second question arises. What kind of knowledge does a “complete gesture” permit? When a gesture is “complete” we understand something in a more determinate way. Any synthesis brings us something new, but this kind of synthesis clarifies in one act an entire idea or concept. Sometimes, as in this passage, we understand something more than the author himself. In the chapter following Sofya’s death, Grossman explains his philosophy again. He underlies that when a person dies, the entire universe that she had in her dies. Only in human existence does life become happiness, freedom, supreme value. Death is slavery. “When a person dies, they cross over from the realm of freedom to the realm of slavery. Life is freedom, and dying is a gradual denial of freedom.”²⁰ However, the Sofya episode has just shown something more: death is the chance for supreme humanity.

In many other passages, Grossman shows this peculiarity of the “complete gestures” that he creates, so much so that when the scene is ended, often questions and not theories arise. When Colonel Darensky defends a mistreated German soldier against a Soviet general, he does not preach about justice. He asks himself questions about his relationship with his people and his nature.

What an abyss lay between the road he was following today and the road he had taken to Yashkul through the Kalmyk steppe. Was he really the same man who, beneath an enormous moon, had stood on what seemed to be the last corner of Russian earth? Who had watched the fleeing soldiers and the snake-like necks of the camels, tenderly making room in his heart for the poor, for the weak, for everyone whom he loved?²¹

The thousands of questions that fill up *Life and Fate* show that the last answer to the problem of the nature of life and freedom is not the theory of Ikonnikov’s manuscript but a much more complicated paradox: life is good at

its origin and it is free; death is evil and is pursued by nature as well as by human beings; but death and evil cannot be a nihilist final description, there is something more in life, something good that makes us raise questions about the meaning of life even when evil seems to triumph. This is the meaning of the fertile death of Sofya Levinton. The human in humanity is not only senseless kindness, but a rational link with the meaning of the universe. This link is usually expressed by small and big questions such as those that Alexandra Vladimirovna asks at the end of the book.

The lives of those close to her were unsettled, confused, full of doubts and mistakes, full of grief. What would happen to Lyudmila? What would be the outcome of her family troubles? Where was Seryozha? Was he even alive? How hard things were for Viktor Shtum? What would happen to Vera and Stepan Fyodorovich? Would Stepan be able to rebuild his life again and find peace? ... And Vera?... And Zhenya? Would she follow Krymov to Siberia?

...

Why were their destinies so confused, so obscure? ... No, whatever life holds in store—hard-won glory, poverty and despair, or death in a labour camp—they will live as human beings and die as human beings, the same as those who have already perished; and in this alone lies man's eternal and bitter victory over all the grandiose and inhuman forces that ever have been or will be.²²

“Complete gestures” show this triple enigma of good, evil, and meaningfulness much more than Grossman's theory, which reaches only the first two steps without any other philosophical solution.

The equal blending of signs typical of “complete gestures” displays the way in which creativity grasps the too-complicated experience of reality. When gestures are not complete they are more ordinary: they represent less and they understand less. However, as we have seen they are always partly creative insofar as they provide new synthetic knowledge.

In the difference between completeness and incompleteness of gestures we can see the difference between ordinary and extraordinary creativity in life, science, and the arts. We can sum up this pragmatist pattern of creativity in a table:

Action without acquisition of knowledge	Reaction	Shock or clash	Uncreative act
Vague (not completely determined) synthesis	Incomplete gestures (phenomenological and semiotic level)	Semiosis (representation and comprehension)	Creativity broadly understood
Completely synthetic pattern	Complete gestures (phenomenological and semiotic level with equal blending of kinds of signs)	Specific semiosis (intentional representation and clarification of comprehension)	Creativity strictly understood

IV Conclusion

The philosophy of “complete gestures” as a key to comprehending what creativity is respects all pragmatist insights. It relies upon a deep continuity between reality and interpretation, as all pragmatists have advocated. Classic pragmatists had a profound understanding of the unity and the rationality of experience so that it can furnish a better explanation of what creativity is. For pragmatists, experience includes, and thus overcomes, any dichotomy: thoughts and actions, facts and values, mind and body, private and public, individual and society, physics and metaphysics. With different nuances, they thought that experience contains all those items at the same time because they are part of a deeper relationship or continuity. As is well known, with different perspectives that range from Peirce’s mathematical studies to James’ psychological insights and Mead’s sociological approach, they also understood this continuity to be evolutionarily determined. The tool of “complete gesture” explains how this continuity can act in synthetic knowing acts.

A last example taken from Grossman will show how much this picture of creativity embedded in experience is a common asset of all those who reflect or try to represent their own creativity. In *Life and Fate* the scientist Viktor Shtrum, Grossman’s alter-ego, discovers a new nuclear power conception. In that moment Grossman describes how creativity works. Here again the representation is superior to the author’s ideas. Grossman wants to say that, contrary to Marxism, ideas are not the product of practice, but in the description of it he affirms a much more profound unity between the whole experience and comprehension. In this description, the phenomenological path of ideas in themselves (*firstness*), physical actions (*secondness*), and final destination (*thirdness*) appears.

And at the same time his head had been full of other laws and relationships: quantum interactions, fields of force, the constants that determined the processes undergone by nuclei, the movement of light, and the expansion and contraction of space and time. To a theoretical physicist the processes of the real world were only a reflection of laws that had been born in the desert of mathematics.

And his head had also been full of readings from different instruments, of dotted lines on photographic paper that showed the trajectories of particles and the fission of nuclei.

And there had even been room in his head for the rustling of leaves, the light of the moon, millet porridge with milk, the sound of flames in the stove, snatches of tunes, the barking of dogs, the Roman Senate, Soviet Information bulletins, a hatred of slavery, and a love of melon seeds.

All this was what had given birth to his theory...And the logic of mathematics, itself quite unconnected with the world, had become reflected and embodied in a theory of physics; and this theory had fitted with divine accuracy over a complex pattern of dotted lines of photographic paper.

And Viktor, inside whose head all this had taken place, now sobbed and wiped tears of happiness from his eyes as he looked at the differential equations and photographic paper that confirmed the truth he had given birth to....

How could he ever make sense of all this...?

...It's a strange feeling, you know. Whatever may happen to me now, I know deep down in my heart that I haven't lived in vain ... No, it's as though a lily had suddenly blossomed out of still, dark waters... Oh, my God...²³

Even if Grossman underlines the power of the mind, the initial richness and indetermination of experience (in which ideas are present as well as the soup) emerges in the concrete adhering of ideas to the scribing of the photographic paper until the blossoming of final truth from those sheets like a water lily from a dark pond.

Here there is no reference to the semiotic unity because it is not represented, but the rest of the story shows that the theory created by Shtrom becomes a crucial technical experiment that has to be performed. The crucial experiment blends together the different kinds of signs. Crucial experiments are scientists' "complete gestures." But the passage serves to illustrate the phenomenological level that any practitioner of creativity strictly understood would recognize. When creativity is at stake there is no more difference between sciences and arts. Creativity works in the same way through the completeness of the phenomenological and the semiotic pattern that find their unity in "gestures" whose equal blending give birth to that special creativity of artists and inventors.

Finally, the pattern of “complete gesture” accounts for three experiences about creativity that common sense acknowledges. First, somehow we understand that there is almost always something creative in the ordinary gesture. In love, religion, work, education, science, and social commitment we are aware (and often happy) when there is some sort of creativity involved in what we are doing. At the same time, we understand that there is a difference between ordinary incomplete gestures and extraordinary complete gestures performed by those whom we consider masters in their field.

Second, the semiotic pattern that presides over gestures and complete gestures accounts for Tolkien’s, Euler’s, and many others great masters’ convictions about the fundamental role of the material act through which our thought develops. The saga of *The Lord of the Rings* stemmed from that first utterance because that statement was a “complete gesture.”

Third, as far as it belongs to a complex development of experience through signs, creativity, in a strict sense, belongs much more to the whole reality in which we are immersed than to our individual geniuses. This explains why creativity on the one hand is perceived as a gift, and on the other hand is always an improvement on something that was “in the air,” that others started thinking, and that somehow belongs to the spirit of times.

Certainly, the peculiarity for which this phenomenological and semiotic flux of reality is accepted, assented, and fostered by singular individuals (and by human beings) remains to be explained and will involve ethical, aesthetical, and psychological studies. This paper wanted to explore the phenomenological and semiotic sides of the phenomenon of creativity through the lenses of literary creation. Further studies are needed in those normative and psychological fields, and I am sure they will confirm the synthetic pattern of the complete gesture as an explanation of creativity broadly and strictly understood.

NOTES

1. Humphrey Carpenter (ed.), *The letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (London: Haper and Collins, 1995), letter 163.
2. Giovanni Vailati, *Gli strumenti della ragione*, ed. Mario Quaranta (Padova: il Poligrafo, 2003), p. 87.
3. Christiane Chauviré, *L’oeil mathématique. Essai sur la philosophie mathématique de Peirce* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2008), pp. 191–195.
4. Fernando Zalamea, *Filosofia francesa de la matemática en el siglo XX*, Seminario, 2012, Pro manuscripto.
5. Joseph Margolis, *What, After All, Is a Work of Art? Lectures in the Philosophy of Art* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).
6. Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

7. John and Carol Garrard, *The Life and Fate of Vasily Grossman* (London: Pen and Sword, 2012).
8. For the story of the manuscript and the entire work of recognition of Grossman's work see the website of the Vasily Grossman Study Center, www.grossmanweb.eu
9. Vasily Grossman, *Life and Fate* (London: Vintage, 2011), pp. 378–379.
10. One of the notable exceptions is Hannah Arendt work on totalitarianism, see Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland: World Pub.Co., 1951).
11. Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, vol. 1, ed. Nathan Houser and Chrisian J. W. Kloesel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 1–27.
12. Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, vol. 2, ed. Nathan Houser and Chrisian J. W. Kloesel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 398–433.
13. Grossman, *Life and Fate*, pp. 375–387.
14. Giovanni Maddalena, “Creative Gesture: a Pragmatist View,” *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 5:1 (2013), pp. 65–76.
15. Grossman, *Life and Fate*, p. 393.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 537.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 538.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 537.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 538.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 539.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 698.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 846.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 333–334.