Thank you for the deep pleasure and high honor of addressing you on this occasion. I owe a special gratitude to Marlene Gomes Mendes and Cecilia Salles. So, quite simply, obrigado. Through them, I have become more vividly aware of an important field of interdisciplinary research. There is perhaps no better site than this field for observing the truly creative character of the engaged researcher. The poetics of creativity is, without question, an appropriate topic for a meeting of such researchers, especially since your own work exhibits nothing less than the creativity of poetics. Your own creative efforts join the efforts of those whom you are so painstakingly yet imaginatively studying. In the name of genetic criticism, creative interpreters join creative artists and the conjunction of such artists and interpreters results in innovative approaches...
to innovative undertakings. It is no surprise, then, that the very name of this project is a matter of dispute. Consensus on the part of such interpreters is a difficult and, at best precarious, achievement vulnerable to the twists and turns of and ongoing activity in which diverse emphases compete with one another. But the absence of such a consensus on nominal and indeed substantive matters is not nearly as striking here as the presence of an unmistakable vitality – undeniable evidence of the growth of signs.

Just as processes of creating can involve the distancing of the self from itself (as Jean-Louis Labrave so compellingly argued yesterday), so processes exploring creativity can immerse one self in the work of another, so fully as to be caught up in the most subtle movements of the creative process. That is, just as processes of creating can involve the *distancing* of the self from itself, so processes of exploring creativity can reduce the distance between one self and another, sometimes to the point of identification. The theological doctrine of the Incarnation speaks of the word becoming flesh. In contrast, the contemporary emphasis on embodiment implies the flesh becoming word and (we might add) becoming other modes of symbolization. But the human body is of course never a diaphanous medium, never completely a transparent one; it is always a densely sedimented and spontaneously responsive materiality. Any medium of semiosis is always something *other than* and indeed *more than* a medium. However readily and fully any material event, process or object lends itself to serving semiosis, it is irreducibly a mode of materiality; it can be nothing less than this, though it might be (in a sense) more. In turn, any mode of materiality possesses its own singularity and opacity (its firstness and secondness). This is clearly true of our bodies in their role as media of semiosis. Sigmund Freud famously remarked, in response to snickers, sometimes a cigar is just a cigar. In truth, a cigar is never just a cigar; but
it is also never just a signifier. Its mode of materiality and, consequent upon this, its efficacious presence in shifting fields of physical interactions precludes it ever being an utterly ethereal and effectively disembodied signifier.

Whatever else the poetics of creativity involves, it unquestionably involves the sustained exertions of embodied actors. Flesh-and-blood agents compose and sing songs, choreograph and perform dances, write and read poems, take and examine photographs, make love and fight wars. The palpable presence of somatic agents as well as the traces of this presence are central to my understanding of subjectivity. Hence, whatever the decentering of human subjectivity means, it does not mean for me the erasure of somatic agency. The *materiality* of our bodies and artifacts needs to be accorded in our theories and discourses the importance this massive, complex, and fateful materiality has in our everyday experience and activities. In this context especially, the meaning of *materiality* is far from obvious and also far from univocal. At the very least, *materiality* means here (1) sensuous immediacy, (2) the persistent constraints of brute actualities (constraints simultaneously enabling *and* inhibiting, facilitating *and* frustrating), and (3) the sites where diverse forces might intersect and transform each other along with the site of their intersection. Concretely imagined, intersubjectivity turns out to be intercorporeality.¹ The palpable presence of somatic agents engaged in complex exchanges with one another and all else is nothing less than the cornerstone of our existence. Yet we more often touch or handle not these embodied others themselves but what they have crafted and transformed. The

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scattered traces of embodied actors need to be collated (these traces need to be gathered together); and the trajectories, gaps, and oppositions discernible in these traces invite us to take them — these perceptible traces of once palpable agents — as the loci of creativity. My aim is not to prove this thesis; rather it is simply to render this thesis clear and, beyond this, somewhat plausible. In other words, my goal is not argumentative but exploratory. Hence, this essay is an attempt not to assemble a compelling case but to investigate important phenomena bearing upon creative poiesis.

My use of poiesis accords with its broad, early meaning, wherein the word designated any process of making, i.e., any process whereby something is brought into being. Part of its original Greek meaning was established by its affinity to, but difference from, phusis (phusis being either a process in which something comes to be or that arche — source — from which something flows into existence). Like phusis, poiesis in its original sense points to a source of generation, that from and through which things come to be and thus to appear (to manifest themselves in myriad and even conflicting ways). The instances of poiesis most relevant to our investigation are, however, the ones in which what is brought into being goes some distance toward redefining the genre or practice of which it is an exemplification. Some material artifact of unpredictable symbolic import is not just brought into being; the way this artifact is crafted alters the history in which it comes to be. The very form of making the artifact is said to exemplify has to some extent been re-made. To take a handful of obvious examples: James Joyce’s Ulysses and Virginia Woolf’s The Waves transform the genre of the novel, as before them Miguel de Cervantes’ Don Quixote transformed an earlier form of literary narration (whatever name this form might be called) into the genre we call the novel. So, too, Jackson Pollock’s paintings have transformed the activity of painting, as Charlie
Parker’s musicking has radically altered the distinctive traditions of contemporary music subsumed under the rubric of jazz.\(^2\)

All of this has been said by way of introduction. In one sense, then, too many introductory words have been offered. In another sense, too few have been uttered. For an adequate understanding of embodied agency is inseparably bound up with a detailed understanding of historical practices, signifying processes, unconscious work (or operations), erotic attachments, dense materiality, and divided subjectivity. But the compass of this paper does not allow me to present at the outset these interwoven features of embodied agency and, then, to trace the implications of each for our understanding of poetics. Even so, I want simply by listing these topics to suggest just how complex and large are those of embodiment and materiality. In what follows, I will have an opportunity to do nothing more than allude to one or another of these connections. But the focal topics discussed here are always to be understood in reference to this extensive field of all that must take into account in order to approximate an adequate understanding of somatic agency.

**A threefold inquiry**

From this point, my exploration will unfold in three phases. *In the first phase*, I will offer a brief sketch of what I take to

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\(^2\) I am following here Christopher Small’s suggestion in *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1998) that there is no such thing as music: “Music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do” (2). One important implication of this suggestion is that “performance does not exist in order to present musical works, but rather, musical works exist in order to give performers something to perform” (8; emphasis omitted). I take the verb in exactly the sense Small gives it when he writes: “To music is to take part in, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composition), or by dancing” (9; again, emphasis deleted).
be, for the sake of understanding subjectivity, the most important implications of what is commonly identified as decentering the subject. In my judgment, the most important of these implications is the decisive shift of theoretical attention to questions of practice: the decentering of the subject means, above all else, the centrality of practices, in their materiality, plurality, historicity, and thus mutability.

*In the second phase,* I will offer (once again) only a very brief sketch of a categorial analysis of creative endeavors and achievements. In particular, I will deploy Charles S. Peirce’s categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness to render clearer those phenomena typically identified as examples of creativity. With the shift *from* the self in itself to the interwoven practices by which emergent subjects (and indeed much else) are to be explained (i.e., with the shift *from* the sovereign subjective *to* authoritative practices), the locus of creativity is both pluralized and historicized. It no longer makes sense to speak in the singular of *the* locus of creativity; rather it becomes imperative to speak in the plural of the loci of creativity. In brief, the locus of creativity is pluralized – so that loci, not any single locus, need to be investigated and, in turn, these turn almost always need to be investigated from diverse perspective and by various means. Plurality, then, characterizes as much the manner as the objects of investigation. In addition, it no longer makes sense to locate the source of creativity *in* the subject. The subject is a constituted and situated being. The subject is constituted by its engagements, entanglements, and conflicts; s/he is situated spatially, temporally, historically, and possibly in other respects. Hence, whatever conscious and ingenious agency we can attribute to individual subjects such as creative

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artists (e.g., however much we are still committed to applying the Romantic category of genius to the artist), we can do so only with a critical awareness of the ways and extent such attributions have little or nothing to do with the original capacities of isolated individuals. The consciousness, ingenuity, creativity, and other traits we attribute to creative agents are always functions of their cultural constitution and historical situatedness. In brief, subjectivity must be historicized. This implies neither cultural nor historical determinism. In the first phase of this investigation, then, we note the shift of attention to questions of practice. In this phase but especially in the later two phases, we note an important implication of this decisive shift for identifying the origin(s) of creativity: the decentering of the subject means, among other things, conceiving creativity as something other than a native and individual endowment of the self in itself. A reconception of subjectivity entails an equally radical reconception of creativity. But this revised understanding of the creative process does not eliminate the efficacious work of creative artists (we justly admire the singular, unique achievements of embodied, situated agents such as Cervantes, Woolf, Joyce, Pollock, or Parker, though for the most part not as solitary accomplishments of innately talented individuals): decentering subjectivity does not mean denying creativity. The conscious, deliberative, and ingenious subjectivity of individual artists, in their apparent solitude, needs to be explained, not explained away. Multiplying the loci of creativity, thus, does not mean subtracting creativity from subjectivity; rather it means adding plurality and historicity to both creativity and subjectivity.

In the third phase, I will trace out several of the most important implications of contemporary accounts of human subjectivity for an understanding of the generation of texts, especially literary texts. A genetic analysis of the various attempts to give appropriate form to an inchoate impulse or originary
inspiration is, arguably, the most illuminating way of coming to terms with the generation of creative artifacts. In suggesting this, I am not implying that such artifacts are reducible to their origins or processes of generation; rather I am affirming that these artifacts encode a history and, consequently, I am affirming the necessity of decoding the history in and through which these artifacts have taken shape. As a result of the shape they have taken, these artifacts have attained the power to shape perception and sensibility, experience and attitude. In addition, they have the power to shape the way others take up the task of shaping genres and media.

These artifacts are the fragments of obscurely suspected processes or histories. Genetic research embeds these fragments in this (otherwise) largely invisible history, making of these texts or artifacts something less fragmentary and static than they so often appear to us. Genetic research exhibits the “finished” work as the cumulative stage in a complex process wherein virtually every step is an experiment. In other words, genetic research transforms an obscurely suspected history into a carefully reconstructed sequence, insofar as this proves to be possible. In this carefully reconstructed sequence, the genetic researcher shows specifically how earlier phases foreshadow later ones and, in turn, how later phases reconfigure earlier ones. Such researchers are invited – indeed, demanded – to read backwards and forwards. It is not only a case of reading the present in light of the past; it is also one of reading the

4. The terms encoding and decoding in this context are possibly misleading, especially to the extent they suggest a formal and structuralist, rather than an historical and pragmatic, approach to the forms and functions of semiosis (or sign-activity). But there is in the generation of any artifact a pattern of correlations in which traces of this generation are discernible. The discernment of these correlations is akin to a process of decoding, while that whereby these correlations are originally forged is akin to the process of encoding. This analogy, however remote, justifies my use of these terms in this context.
past in light of the present and even to some extent the variable futures opened by an unfinished present. Any historical present does more than sum up an extended sequence of antecedent events; it also continuously, sometimes quite radically, transforms the significance of this sequence. This is true of even the present simply as it emerges out of natural processes such as the metabolic functioning of a living organism or the natural selection of biological species: what an organism is, individually but also specifically, both sums up a history and is caught up in a present capable of altering the import of that history. But it is especially true of those historical practices in which the self-conscious and self-critical use of signs plays such a central role.\(^5\)

**The centrality of embodied, historical practices**

The diverse critiques of the modern subject (including those of Charles Peirce and Jacques Lacan) have important but often unacknowledged implications for our understanding of imagination, creativity, and an array of allied conceptions. As already indicated, I would like to take this gathering as an opportunity to explore some of the more important of these implications, especially as they bear upon the complex genesis of literary texts. The decentering of the subject points us toward the genesis of subjectivity, toward the processes and practices in and through which subjects are constituted. In light of the work of quite diverse thinkers animated by quite different motives and working in various disciplines – for example, Charles Sanders Peirce, George Herbert Mead, Jacques Lacan,

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Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Teresa de Lauretis, and Judith Butler (to name only a fraction of those who have influenced my own thinking on this topic) – this point is by now very familiar.

On this occasion, however, I am not interested in the genesis of subjectivity for its own sake, but rather for the sake of advancing our understanding of the genesis of texts. The question of the genesis of subjectivity only provides the background against which questions of creativity and textuality will be considered. Even so, emphasis on the process of generation is the thread by which diverse topics are woven together into a coherent fabric, insofar as they are woven into such a fabric! Of course, you – not I – are the ones to judge the coherence of my reflections on subjectivity, creativity, and textuality.⁶

A main point, however familiar, requiring emphasis here concerns the sovereignty traditionally ascribed to subjectivity, including self-possession and self-knowledge as integral to this sovereignty. The most important contemporary critiques of human subjectivity amount to nothing less than the decentering of the subject. In turn, the decentering of the subject renders extremely unproblematic, if not entirely untenable, any presumption on the part of human beings to

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6. What Peirce wrote in reference to himself I could adapt to myself in this connection. Looking back on his work circa 1897, he saw the development of his ideas yielding a “wild” harvest. He wrote, “to me that harvest seems a wild one, but of course it is not I who have to pass judgment. It is not quite you, either, individual reader; it is experience and history” (Collected Papers, 1.13). But the responses of individual listeners and readers are precisely what, in time, give direction and shape to the judgments of history. Even so, it is important to stress, with Peirce: a human being is not whole as long as that being is single, for humans are essentially possible members of human society. “Especially, one [woman or] man’s experience is nothing, if it stands alone. If we see what others cannot, we call it hallucination. It is not ‘my’ experience, but ‘our’ experience that has to be thought of; and this ‘us’ has indefinite possibilities” (Collected Papers, 5.402.n2)
be sovereign masters of even their own thoughts and utterances, thus of their writings and creations. These critiques render highly problematic the extent to which self-possession and self-knowledge are attainable.

In the wake of Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud especially, the ego or “I” (i.e., the conscious, deliberative self) is shown to be not even the master of its own house. Attention shifts from what we might call the self in itself (the self apart from all else) to the embodied, social, historical, and cultural aspects of the processes by which the human organism is transformed into a reflexive agent (an agent capable of self-reflection, self-criticism, and self-control). Put in a slightly different way, attention shifts from the self in itself to embodied, social, historical, and cultural practices. Marked negatively, the critiques of Peirce, Lacan, Foucault, and Derrida (to name but four of the most important theorists in this regard) drive toward the decentering of the subject. Marked positively, these critiques move practices (especially an interwoven array of signifying practices) from the margins to the center of theoretical attention. In brief, they establish the centrality of practice. The self as a constituting presence is an always already constituted being. The constitution of subjectivity is a function of the human organism participating in such cultural practices as verbal interaction and imaginative play. Such interaction is not only an exchange of signs but also a play of desires and an exercise of power. Arguably, even the most seemingly innocent exchanges are erotically charged and politically implicated.

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7. The work of George Herbert Mead is especially important for illuminating how the human organism is transformed into a distinctive subjectivity as the result of its more or less instinctual engagement in playful activity, wherein the organism plays a variety of roles and thus comes to perceive itself from a plurality of perspectives. See, e.g., his Mind, Self, and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1934), 152-64.
processes. In any event, the process of subjectivization is one wherein the human organism is transformed into a reflexive subject as a result of being immersed from the beginning of its life in practices pertaining to the body, practices themselves pertaining to the most imperative somatic drives and impulses. The infant is in the world by virtue of its capacity to incorporate the world into itself, initially by virtue of taking into its mouth the breast or its surrogate (taking in what the breast is and, in effect, signifies). Desire, power, and significance are from the outset woven together in such a way that they cannot truly be disentangled. In addition, our embodied mode of being in the world is itself inseparably entangled with our incorporating mode of embodiment. Our erotic attachments and attractions always run the risk of incorporating entirely the other into the self, and thus the risk of effacing or annihilating the other in its otherness.

Materiality in this connection means, quite emphatically, animality, hence nuanced sensitivity as much as sensuous presence, motility as much as appetite, breath and the speech made possible by the organs so intimately connected with breathing. My being is undeniably that of a distinctive form of animal life. It is ineluctably bound up with the material conditions of a specific form of animal life, so much so that the disembodied cogito constituting itself by its own performative utterance (“I think, therefore I am”) can only be seen as the pathetic delusion of a deracinated consciousness (a conscious animal at least theoretically estranged from the material conditions of its actual existence). In place of this Cartesian certainty, we must put the inherently vulnerable

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8. See, e.g., Sigmund Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia.”
9. Speaking is, without exaggeration, the transfiguration of breathing.
complex of our metabolic functioning, for which breathing can serve as a synecdochic sign (for the single function of breathing is being taken to stand for the totality of functions – i.e., the part is taken to stand for the whole). In place of an epistemic certainty, we substitute what is manifest yet precarious, our breathing (our life in its vulnerability and mortality). Quite simply, in place of “I think, therefore I am”, we assert, “I breathe, there I am”. By virtue of breathing in this synecdochic sense, I live and love, and therefore speak and gesture, imagine and recollect – and think in other ways. The Cartesian subject as a disembodied, solitary, theoretical consciousness is thereby replaced by the human organism as a material, social, and engaged as well as implicated agent.

The decentering of the subject marks the shift from the self in itself to the pervasive yet precarious ways the other is in the self and the self is in the other. Alterity is inscribed in subjectivity. Given these critiques, the locus of creativity can no longer be identified with the imagination, especially when the imagination is itself conceived as a power inherent in an individual psyche. Indeed, it no longer makes any sense to speak of the locus of creativity, for the postmodern subject is, in various ways, a fissured being, itself multiply located in a web of interwoven practices. Thus, it is imperative to speak of loci here. Moreover, it is crucial to see these sites of creativity as ones where practices intersect.

AN ANALYSIS OF CREATIVITY

Peirce’s categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness were crafted and revised principally as a means of guiding and goading investigation in any area or field, especially those not yet opened or those in need of being revivified. Accordingly, I propose to use Peirce’s categories here as aids in analyzing phenomena pertaining to creativity. In an early
text, Peirce himself proposed to explain the relationship of object, sign, and interpretant by analogy to the triune God of traditional Christianity (the Christian trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit). This would seem to be clearly a case of explaining the mysterious by the even more mysterious. My own proposal, however, might strike at least some of you as another example of explaining the mystery of human creativity by means of the mysterious doctrine of the Peircean categories! Yet the power of Peirce’s categories is, in my judgment, nowhere more evident than in the ability to render more luminous and intelligible, beginning simply at the level of description, phenomena such as creativity (i.e., phenomena which have proven hard to describe accurately and even harder to explain in a barely adequate way).  

Carl Hausman is certainly correct when he suggests the struggle to explain creativity drives us to revise our understanding of explication or explanation. This struggle makes clear to us the need to think differently – i.e., think creatively – about what might count as an explanation in this context. At the very least, it demands taking seriously the possibility that the principles of explanation are not the same as the principles of prediction. Allied with this possibility there is the possibility that some processes have a rather singular retroactive power. In addition, it is not only possible but also likely that the most appropriate approach to these singular processes is self-consciously retrospection (a looking back at what has taken place or has taken shape, though this process

10. In Praxis and Action (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), Richard J. Bernstein suggests, there is "a descriptive, empirical pragmatic temper manifested in Peirce’s use of the categories. The ‘proof’ or, more accurately the adequacy of the categories is to be found in the ways in which Peirce uses them to illuminate fundamental similarities and differences in everything we encounter" (178).

of looking back demands of those engaged in it to read both forwards and backwards the sequence of events and experiments).\textsuperscript{12}

The secondness of truly creative or innovative works seems to be their most salient or distinctive feature.\textsuperscript{13} For such works are identifiable as creative or innovative by virtue of their otherness from what has been previously and indeed paradigmatically achieved in some field or practice. Such works destabilize existing paradigms and thereby engender compelling alternatives to established exemplars. Yet it is perhaps the case that phenomena of creativity are ones in which all three categories are equally prevalent, not ones in which a single category eclipses the other two. In any event, the firstness and thirdness of creative works are no less important than the secondness of such works. What a creative or innovative work is, \textit{in itself}; apart from all else, commands our attention. To consider it only in reference to endeavors or achievements

\textsuperscript{12} In \textit{Psycho-Analysis as History: Negation and Freedom in Freud} (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), Michael S. Roth argues psychoanalysis is "\textit{a theory of history} because it develops a grid through which certain periods of \textit{and events in} a person's past are given an extraordinary place in the perspective on the present; also, because it views certain types of action and thought as having a greater impact on the succeeding development of the person's history than others" (17). He stresses, "Psycho-analysis can add to our understanding of the possibilities of change only through its theory of history of the group and the individual. If it were used to \textit{predict the content of change}, it would be distorted into something that would only vaguely resemble Freud's work. Psycho-Analytic theory ..., is capable only of bringing into consciousness the contradictions that can lead to change" (28). Analogously, genetic criticism is capable primarily of bringing into focus the contradictions, conflicts, alterations, and accidents that have contributed to a specific series of changes. In both cases, the mode of explanation is \textit{retrodactive}. To try to make either conform to the patterns of \textit{predictive} explanation would distort the one as much as the other beyond recognition.

\textsuperscript{13} Secondness is the category of otherness, alterity, or opposition. It points to the relations where in one thing stands opposed to another, especially in those cases where these relations of opposition go toward defining or individuating the beings standing in opposition to one another.
other than itself, indeed, dooms us to miss what is unique or singular about such strivings or successes. There is in a truly creative or innovative work a curious mixture of firstness and secondness. In its otherness, in its being dramatically different from (say) what other artists have done with this genre, the creative work demands to be taken in itself. That is, it demands to be taken on its own terms, to be explained (if explained at all) by principles and strategies immanent in the processes by which it came into being. To trace it only to sources outside of this generative process (e.g., to consider it only or even mainly in reference to antecedents and influences) is to miss what is definitive of the work in question. Consideration of antecedents and influences can and, indeed, must play a crucial role in articulating how a situated subject, implicated in an overlapping array of historical practices, transformed one or more of these practices. Disruptive novelty and irreducible uniqueness, however, are phenomena to be explained, to the extent they are explicable, only in reference to the singular process by which such novelty and uniqueness come to be.

Paradoxically, this inherent, insistent demand to be taken on its own terms – to be interpreted and explained mainly in terms of itself (at times, it seems even solely in terms of itself) – does not isolate the work from other aspirations or attainments. Quite the opposite is the case. In demanding its own firstness, what it is in itself apart from all else, the work paradoxically secures its thirdness. It is other than any other such work and its otherness points us toward its ipseity (what it is itself [ipse] or in itself). But what the work is in itself is a unique nexus of far from completely determinate or perhaps even determinable relationships, so that the firstness of the work points us toward the thirdness of the work. I am inclined to suggest that, in creative artistic works, what we discern more clearly than in any other phenomena is precisely the firstness of thirdness, the qualitative dimensions of self-transformative continua (what
thirdness is, in itself, apart especially from the fully determinate aspects of its actual functioning). More simply, the creative work is far from an insular item or isolated datum; it is rather part of a field of connections it helps to generate and expand. This field is, at least, as much one in which relationships are yet to be determined as it is one in which they have already been determined, hence my characterization of the creative work as a unique nexus indeterminate and perhaps even indeterminable relationships. The truly creative work is always, in some measure, a work yet to be determined; it is never fully determinate or exhaustively realized. Its being creative is one with its being connected in novel ways with familiar phenomena and, beyond this, its being productive of novel connections. Its creativity resides as much in the novelty of its mediations as in its otherness and its uniqueness (or singularity). It resides as much as in its thirdness as in its secondness or firstness. I hope this all too brief and compacted sketch offers a glimpse of the power of Peirce’s categories to illuminate the definitive features of creative works.

The overarching task of genetic criticism is, however, to offer an account of the processes by which works or performances in which just these features come to be sensuously and semiosically embodied. This account must be historical, because it must painstakingly yet imaginatively reconstruct the sequences by which certain steps were taken and certain guesses made; also, because it must trace in detail a sequence of accumulations and erases through which a unique nexus acquires its effective form.

THE LOCI OF CREATIVITY

Any text or document is, from the perspective of such criticism, a phase in a process of generation, the origins and outcomes of which are, in principle, indefinable in any absolute
or final manner. To repeat, *any text is a phase in a process of generation*; and, as such, any text or document needs to be investigated in reference to *both* earlier and later phases. In other words, any text must be envisioned as the outcome of experimentation and the origin of interpretation. It facilitates future experimentation and, in a manner, constrains possible interpretation.\(^{14}\) The processes of experimentation by which it came into being and the processes of interpretation by which it sustains itself in the history of its reception are not external to the text itself, at least when considered as the fragment of a history. To read the text in abstraction from the experimental processes by which it was generated and the interpretive processes by which it proves itself to be *generative*—to read a text in abstraction from such processes—can be a legitimate and insightful way of taking it up.\(^{15}\) But such a *synchronic* approach to texts proves impoverished and impoverishing, unless it is complemented by a *diachronic* approach, in particular, a diachronic approach cutting across the *details* of experimentations underlying and interpretations following the text.

Thus, the poetics of creativity points us toward poiesis as a *process* of generation, to be investigated diachonically. Near the end of this paper, I will suggest how this process of

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15. I am far from happy with this formulation, since it seems to contrast all too sharply a process of experimentation with a process of interpretation, also since it seemingly disjoins the abductive creativity of the artist from the interpretive activity of the genetic critic. But artists are, as such, engaged in interpreting their own efforts as a way of facilitating the process of making more telling or effective guesses, so their creative experiments necessarily have a hermeneutic dimension. On the other side, the genetic critic is clearly engaged in an abductive process, the success of which depends upon joining with the creative urges and energies of the somatic agent scribbling words on paper, or shaping sounds on a saxophone, or arranging colors on a canvas.
generation might be illuminated by considering it in conjunction with Peirce's account of evolution. The processes by which texts or artifacts are generated are instances of telescoped or compacted processes analogous to those Peirce discerned in biological and cultural evolution. Quite simply, poiesis is a process and, unless it is conceived and investigated as a process, poiesis will remain utterly mysterious or unintelligible. It may be the case that, in some manner and measure, poiesis will always remain an irreducibly mysterious process. But to some extent this process lends itself to explanation. Most of all, it lends itself to the historical imagination for an imaginative reconstruction of the actual process by which the creative text (or artifact) came into being. Such a reconstruction can never fully explain the creativity inherent in the text or artifact; but it does render more comprehensible and, indeed, luminous this creativity.

The poetics of creativity points us toward investigating poiesis as a process of generation, wherein any phase is simultaneously generated and generative.\(^{16}\) That is, any phase is both outcome and origin, the summation of an actual past and the opening of possible futures. The work of investigating this process can take diverse forms. Among the most important work to be done in this context is the detailed exploration of archival materials, for the purpose of identifying the changes wrought in a series of iterations. In light of such research, the identity of the text becomes destabilized, so that the final or published draft in isolation from earlier drafts might no longer appear to have an uncontestable claim to the title of text. It may be that the *series* of drafts has as weighty or even a weightier claim to the title of text, such that the final or published draft is most properly understood as an identifiable phase in an *ongoing*

\(^{16}\) This makes this process akin to the functional component of semiosis that Peirce identifies as the interpretant.
history. Whatever might turn out to be the case regarding the identity of a text, the most important point here is that, in pointing us toward poiesis as a process of generation, the poetics of creativity points us toward various kinds of work. No form of this work is, however, more important than the archival research through which the sedimented layers of literary or (more generally) artistic production are individually identified and chronologically related to one another.

Even so, the work of the theoretical imagination can assist the work of the historical imagination. For it is important not only to thematize but also to theorize such topics as subjectivity, creativity, and textuality. That is, it is certainly important to make such topics focal and explicit; but it is additionally important to craft the conceptual and rhetorical resources whereby such topics can be illuminated. To paraphrase Immanuel Kant, theory without history is empty, whereas history without theory is blind. Genetic criticism can be either theoretically illuminated and thus illuminating or methodologically blind and hence obfuscating.

My own contribution to this gathering has, in any case, been an exercise of theoretical imagination, not an enactment of historical research. In the background of my theoretical account of a tight knot of interwoven topics, however, there are several archival projects, mostly ones involving the unpublished manuscripts of C. S. Peirce. But, on this occasion, this archival research is almost entirely in the background; while it informs and animates my theoretical discussion, my main contribution to our communal investigation is of a theoretical character. At every turn, however, the upshot of this theory is the need to turn, concretely, to the multitudinous details of the relevant histories in and through which human artifacts take human shape and acquire human significance. The insights of theoretical imagination establish just how indispensable are the investigations of the historical imagination,
so much so that what I am calling here by two different names (the theoretical and the historical imagination) are in truth but distinct aspects of a single capacity.

Taking seriously the genesis of subjectivity means approaching differently questions of creativity. Above all, it means thinking differently about the *locus* of creativity: the imagination of the individual artist is *not* the sole locus of creativity. Taking seriously this genesis also means thinking differently about the *work* in which creativity is paradigmatically present (e.g., the creative discovery of a theoretical scientist or the creative innovation of a literary artist). Paradoxically, working over – working over *and over* – the same thing, sometimes apparently in the same way, is often a salient feature of the characteristic manner in which even the most creative artists and thinkers actually *work*. So many of the creative endeavors of imaginative persons *seem to be* simply a clearly laborious and apparently unimaginative reworking of materials.\(^{17}\) Creativity here is only discernible *in the process of reworking* what frequently has been worked over in various ways, on numerous occasions. It is a feature of how agents *over a stretch of time* engage in a practice such as painting or writing. The loci of creativity thus turn out to be the places where diverse practices intersect or those where the same practice is turned upon itself. The locus of creativity is not the imagination of the individual; rather the loci of creativity are the often apparently unimaginative ways in which an engaged participant takes up and tries to carry forward some project.

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17. Working over and over, seemingly in the same way, some material or performance is hardly ever a purely mechanical repetition, a mindless doing of the done thing. But, even when it is close to such a repetition, such work opens itself to happy accidents.
While the *loci* of creativity are multiple (while they are primarily to be found in the trajectories, gaps, and oppositions discernible in the material traces bearing the signature of embodied agents), the *process* of creation is one of generation over which conscious, deliberative agents have only limited control. This process is in effect a dialogue between an artist and the materials on which the artist is working and the traditions out of which s/he is working. Whatever degree of consciousness and control artists win by virtue of their continuous struggle (in Samuel Beckett’s words) to fail better, it is often very slight. The artistic subject is no more sovereign, no more fully in possession or command of itself, than human subjectivity as it is engaged in any other historical practice. Nor does the artistic subject possess a comprehensive and clear self-understanding. It knows not the deeper sources of its activity or the ultimate reach of its achievements. This is, however, not a shortcoming but a virtue. Part of the value of art is to undermine our tendencies to knowingness. Nothing obstructs knowing more than knowingness. The creative process is one in which radical ignorance – the acute consciousness of not knowing what one is doing – animates and informs the process to a greater extent than in virtually any other instance of human striving. When Paul Cézanne wrote at the age of 67 that “I am still learning from nature, and it seems to me I am making slow progress,” he was not being falsely modest or in any way disingenuous.\(^\text{18}\) He was speaking from the center, unstable and uncertain as it was, of

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18. Maurice Merleau-Ponty not only quotes this at the outset of his brilliant essay on “Cézanne’s Doubt” but also makes much of what this implies, along the lines of what I am suggesting in terms of knowingness (though he does not use this term in this connection). My own thinking about the topic of knowingness has been deeply influenced by Jonathan Lear. See, e.g., “Knowingness and Abandonment” in *Open Minded: Working Out the Logic of the Soul* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).
his artistic subjectivity. By trying to confront unblinking his own ignorance of his defining passion, he was to some extent free from the trap of knowingness and thus the tricks of the clever technician.

The process of creativity is, arguably, akin to that of evolution, especially as Peirce described this biological and cultural process of generating novel possibilities. It is a process in which chance variation, inherited patterns of sustained exertion, and cataclysmic events imposing stupendous demands upon fragile creatures are all at play. It is, moreover, a process in which selection is generative of possibilities. That is, selection is not solely or even mainly an eliminative process. Selection is in some crucial respects generative, opening or expanding a field of possibilities, rather than limiting or destroying such fields. Finally, it is a process in which eros and agape, two distinct yet intertwined forms of love, play a critical role. If this general suggestion is at all true, then the process of creativity is one in which various factors variously and variably contribute. It is moreover a process in which chance plays a primordial role, but also one in which love exerts a real yet limited control over the course of involvement with materiality, media, tradition, and numerous other factors.

**Conclusion**

A Peircean theory of human subjectivity, though one in which the unconscious dimensions of psychic functioning (dimensions explicitly recognized by Peirce himself) are highlighted even more dramatically than in his writings, provides a framework in which artistic innovation and revision

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can be effectively explored. Important examples of such innovation and revision can be found in countless places, but my own interests and passions point me toward several writings (and, of course, rewritings) by Virginia Woolf and several figures from the history of jazz in the second half of the twentieth century (most notably, Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk). Peirce's own manuscripts provide additional materials to be explored in this manner. There is, at the center of this Peircean theory, a notion of what I have called implicated agency (for as agents, we are always already implicated in an interwoven set of historical practices). From the perspective of this theory, the loci of creativity turn out to be in processes of semiosis and also in the conditions, contexts, and consequences of these processes. Somatic agents are ineluctably implicated agents who form themselves as they struggle to give arresting form to recalcitrant materials. They are implicated participants in an ongoing, open-ended dialogue, occurring at multiple levels (most of these levels beneath explicit and articulate consciousness). The lives of such agents are themselves experiments: they are as much on trial as the traditions, materials, media, and techniques with which they are experimenting. Their lives quiver in the precarious possibilities generated by artistic experimentation. Intelligible traces of the uneven course of this extended experimentation can be collated and chronicled, described and interpreted, but also theorized. The poetics of creativity should encompass nothing less.

21. I am only saying of artists what Peirce said of scientists: The lives of Copernicus, Brahe, Kepler, Galileo, Harvey, Gilbert, and countless others "were so many experiments in regard to the efficacy [or efficacy] of the method of experimentation" (4.31).