

**The circular semiotics of the creative process:  
semiosis and translation through Emma Kunz's *New Method of Drawing***

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**Abstract**

This chapter reflects on the act of creating pictorial artworks, and the multiple translations between substances—thought and idea, verbal, iconic, plastic. Each step is connected to different semiotic operations and, thus, invites postulates from various semiotic theories in its analysis and as tools enabling those steps to unfold. The theoretical reflection starts with an overview of the syncretic works of Roland Barthes, Wassily Kandinsky and Emma Kunz, whose practices merged theory, research, and artistic creation. In these cases, the operations are interlocked and the act of creation appears as a circular semiotic process in which the artist reflects on the meaning of form, colour and composition—the expected application of semiotics—but also intentionally uses semiotic processes as tools for creation—thus reversing the theory's direction as a “generative” tool. The author's own interdisciplinary process in the drawing series *Creation*, inspired by Kunz's new method of drawing, serves as a case study for creative processes in which the lines between representation and manifestation are blurred, enabling a discussion of dimensionality in creative and communicative processes. The chapter draws from the works of Algirdas-Julien Greimas, Jean-Marie Floch on figurative and visual semiotics, Juri Lotman's cultural semiotics, and biosemiotic concepts from Jakob von Uexküll and Thomas A. Sebeok.

*Keywords:* interdisciplinary research; translation; generative semiotics; semiotics of culture; biosemiotics

**Introduction**

Behind the veil of rationality placed over the 20th-century geometric abstractions, we find Wassily Kandinsky's (Cf. 1947, 2000) theories on the “spiritual” and Piet Mondrian's description of his compositions as “Theosophical” (Meier *et al.*, 1998, p. 94), as well as innovative artists such as Hilma af Klimt, Agnes Martin, and Georgiana Houghton (Althaus *et al.*, 2018; Zegher & Teicher, 2005), whose artistic explorations attempt at a direct correspondence with unseen layers of reality. To varied extents, those art forms deconstruct the concept of the artist as a “creator”, understanding them instead as a *medium* that can operate what, semiotically, could be defined as a translation between the physical plane and other realms of existence. Such spaces are hard to define without resorting to terms invested with religious connotations—“supernatural”, “spiritual”, “angelic”. Through an inventory and accompanying

interpretation of form and colour manifested through the projection of specific emotions, intentions, and even emanations from music, Annie Besant's work *Thought-Forms* (1905) conciliates art and esotericism, outlining a grammar of extra-physical manifestations, in a work that is believed to have influenced many abstract artists from the early 20th century.

Exhibited and theorised alongside artists considered "channellers", the Swiss healer and researcher, Emma Kunz, appears as a very special "case". Although very little is recorded when it comes to her process or the specific meaning of each of the more than 500 drawings she produced, it is known that Kunz's pictorial works are closely related to her research into the natural world: the works created on graph paper with graphite and oil coloured pencils are records of the movements of a dowsing pendulum, in an attempt to constitute a visualisation of vibrational phenomena related to physical, mental, and spiritual processes (Afschar, 2021; Althaus *et al.*, 2018; Meier *et al.*, 1998; Zegher & Teicher, 2005). Beyond the classification of the phenomenon as physical, supernatural, or scientific, I am interested in the interlocking of several semiotic processes that constitute Kunz's process of research in Radiesthesia, and the chain of translations that lead from the reception of vibrations to its manifestation into a perceptible form, which must then be retranslated through the intersection between artist/healer and patient. Kunz's understanding of her own practice as research, rather than art, emphasises the semiotic nature of her interdisciplinary practice, which also offers a compelling model of the creative process itself.

In the process of consultation, Kunz recorded points marking pendulum turns, creating a map of subtle energies relating to her question; secondly, she utilised this initial map to visualise the connections: she knew exactly what lines to connect, what colours to use, what thickness and quality of line to apply, and what overlay needed to be performed (Meier *et al.*, 1998)—even though it is said that, often, the final results of her drawings surprised her (Zegher & Teicher, 2005). Finally, she would contemplate the result of her own work alone, and use the images in the process of healing, by placing them on the floor, between her and her patients, so that she could visualise the patient's lifeline through the drawing (Meier *et al.*, 1998). In this process, forms become manifested and can have an effect on both the artist and the viewer, constituting a translation between a realm that is neither visible nor perceptible to those with ordinary sensibility, and the realm that can be perceived by our sensory apparatus. Likewise, various forces—artist, viewer, and vibratory phenomena—become co-creators through the process of execution and apprehension of the artwork.

Juri Lotman (2013) references Lev Tolstoy's understanding of the artwork as co-created *with* reality, which makes its very nature a semiotic one. Kunz's process presents a paradigmatic and interdisciplinary case of this statement, in which semiosis *is* (co)creation: as her practice intersects the spiritual, medical, and artistic as vectors either radiating from or converging in the same manifestation, her doing also connects various visions of semiotic paradigms, allowing her practice to be seen through

the lenses of the Generative tradition (Cf. Greimas, 1984, 1986, 1987; Greimas & Courtés, 1993), Biosemiotics (Sebeok, 1979; Uexküll, 2013), and Semiotics of Culture (Lotman, 1990, 2009, 2013). Her work also illuminates statements from the same Lotman (2013, p. 45), for whom semiotics as a discipline emerged to constitute “...a bridge linking what had seemed to be independent fields of knowledge”.

Attempting my own interdisciplinary union of Emma Kunz’s (1953) drawing method and semiotics, my investigation into the creative process resulted in three pendulum drawings titled *Creation I-3* (2024), which will offer a case study of creativity as simultaneously discursive, biological, and “magical”. The analyses of the three artworks aim to complete the process of their creation, reversing semiotics into its “creative” potential to reflect, beyond the description and analysis of pictorial texts, on the principles governing the act of creation and its different “substances”—manifested and abstract, perceptible and extra-sensory, natural and “supernatural”.

### **Development of the theoretical approach**

Approaching the limits between the visible and invisible, the perceptible and that which exists only in the vibratory realm of subtle energy entails more than the intertwining semiotic paradigms: such a project requires an interlacing of various languages and the translations between them—verbal, non-verbal, and a third substance belonging to a realm that is not ordinarily accessible to our sensory apparatus. The awareness that creativity—whether it is understood in spiritual or secular terms—is a door of dialogue with spaces outside one’s habitual phenomenal sphere sheds light on the problem of the artwork not as a representative, finished utterance [*énoncé*] (see the definition by Greimas & Courtés, 1993), but as a manifestation: an open, processual instance of enunciation [*enunciation*] (see the definition by Greimas & Courtés, 1993), whose meaning is continuously (re)constructed.

Creation, whether it is verbal or non-verbal, remits to a special form of dialogue between subjects that, in earthly terms, do not occupy the same plane of existence: the Addressee of the insight, idea, message, or phenomenon is located in our gaugeable, material reality, whereas the Addresser is, by the parameters of our own sensory apparatus, either “non-physical” or a “non-physical portion” of a physical phenomenon. In Kunz’s explorations of the natural and human worlds, the act of drawing doesn’t appear as a project to “represent” this force or action from the outside; rather, her work is an attempt to allow the phenomenon to *express itself* through her mediation. In this dynamic, it is possible to speak of *collaboration*: the artist—the one holding the pencil—loans their exceptional perception of another realm, providing the means to collapse the perception gap between two distinct phenomenal spheres.

This encounter with action from the outside was the object of the late Greimas (1987), and also some of Lotman’s works (1990, 2009, 2013); in Rudolf Steiner’s (2000) Anthroposophy, it appears as a matter of “dimensionality” and the observer’s perspective: the “outside” only appears as such until one expands their awareness and ability to perceive and alter dimensions beyond the material reality. Amongst

the few who attempted to theorise Emma Kunz's work, there is much debate about what the drawings are. Teicher (Zegher & Teicher, 2005) remarks on these as frontal images through which one enters layers of pulsing space; while Thorne (2019, para. 7) describes Kunz doing as "...a visual code through which to capture and convey the torrent of divine vibrations". Klein (Zegher & Teicher, 2005, p. 139) talks of a connection to the universal unconscious, and the drawings as "...the physical expression of energy's unseen organized fields." Meier (1998, p. 25), remarks that her work constitutes an "...embodiment of the knowledge that initially withholds itself from the rational mind..." Rather than a pictorial project with purely artistic objectives, Kunz wanted to create "...summaries of her empirical and intuitive knowledge of the connection between physical phenomena and the spiritual universe" (Meier *et al.*, 1998, p. 64), in which the plastic formants (see the definition by Greimas, 1984; Floch, 1985) communicated resistance or openness to the elements as well as the forces cutting across the "divine intention". Szeemann—Kunz's most enthusiastic curator—concludes that her work consists of "...a two-dimensional projection of a process beyond space and time" (Meier *et al.*, 1998, p. 65) or "...relationships from the fourth dimension set down in two dimensions" (cited in Afschar, 2021, p. 47).

Whether the access to this other realm occurs in an intuitive or methodological effort, the manifestation of the artwork is a rhizomatic semiotic doing, in the sense, proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1980), of instances reaching to or radiating from multiple directions. The process of translating a non-material, abstract concept into a sensory product can equally be read through Uexküll's (2013; Sebeok, 1979) image of a significant world and the chains of semiosis required in each gesture of an organism. The manifestation of an artwork is the common ground between two *Umwelten*: our own phenomenal world, and another that is non-physical—although, through a biosemiotic reading, we could speculate that they *are* as physical as we are, even if outside of our normal perceptual abilities. Such insight could assist in undoing the common misconception that, because these sets of phenomena have been accessed only by a smaller portion of people, these manifestations are imaginary fabrications, "supernatural", or bluntly "weird". Nonetheless, this encounter of worlds speaks of a syncretism in which the artwork serves as an attempt to find a common language making the intersection of realms that are not necessarily "compatible" or "translatable", which mirrors Kunz's own syncretism between the spiritual world, healing practice, and art.

A similar syncretism between substances is identified by Jean-Marie Floch (1985) in his reading of Roland Barthes' drawings and scripture. Rather than a phenomenon of "abstraction", Floch (1985) understands Barthes' drawings as emerging from something other than form, colour, and technical gesture: they are part of Barthes' semi-symbolic "ethics of the sign", which crosses his works in both verbal and non-verbal languages, cutting the relation signifier-signified and fracturing the block of signification that is a product of History. In the opening of *L'empire des signes*, Barthes writes: "The text

does not ‘comment’ on the images. The images do not ‘illustrate’ the text... Text and image, interlacing, seek to ensure the circulation and exchange of these signifiers...” (Barthes, 1970, p. 9, my translation) This synaesthesia of the sign causes Barthes’ syncretic drawings and writings to enact a collision of languages, which generate a semi-symbolic system of signs “in action” (Floch, 1985)—which, in my reading, speak of the interlocking of verbal and non-verbal as complementary forces in the creative act.

Through a different vocabulary, Teicher (Zegher & Teicher, 2005) credits Emma Kunz with a method using drawing as a form of problem-solving, in which art becomes the expression of a search. In this process, she was generating her own thinking through artistic activity, which, similarly to Barthes’s, could be defined as her own semiotic system. Kunz’s syncretic semiotic system marries the physical and non-physical worlds, as well as the visual and auditory. In his analysis of the harmonic patterns in Emma Kunz’s drawings, Haase (Meier *et al.*, 1998, p. 120) speculates that some of the vibratory imprints created by her could be “auditory images” or “musical images”, according to the theories developed by Albert von Thimus and Hans Kayser. The presence of intervallic proportions and the prevalence of measure and number in some of her works, he adds (Meier *et al.*, 1998), are in correspondence with Plato’s Pythagorean theory of the “world soul” as a musical scale, showcasing a vision of vibratory phenomena in which physics and mathematics are “pervaded by music”.

The phenomenon Kunz was researching and drawing from 1938 was first named, in the 1950s, by Énel (1959), who studied the emission of colour and shape coining the term “form waves” [*ondes de forme*]*—*a phenomenon that fuelled decades of research in Radiesthesia (see for example B elizal, 1976; B elizal & Morel, 2015; Chaumery & B elizal, 1976; Karim, 2010; La Foye, 1975; Servranx & Servranx, 1995, 2002). The premise of Radiesthesia is the existence of a realm of “subtle energies”; by using instruments such as pendulums, dual rods, and aurameters, it is possible to measure the resonance of bodies, living or dead, with specific form waves, which can be used to map states of illness and health in humans, animals, plants and material objects (including buildings), interrogating the ability of specific shapes to contain and emit form waves that can be beneficial as well as harmful.

In what is described in her own words as “...design and form as measure, rhythm, symbol and transformation of number and principle” (Kunz, 1953), Kunz’s creation of drawings through research in Radiesthesia anticipates some of those principles. Her naturopathic healing practice, harnessing the “active and dynamic field” created by the diagrams, speaks of a multidirectional practice of translation. On the one hand, her systematic recording of pendulum swings aims at creating, in visual language, an inventory of vibratory phenomena; secondly, the contemplation of the product, by herself alone, requires a second translation, from the visual “map” of the issue to her own *Innenwelt**—*a concept roughly translatable as the significant “inner world” of an organism (see Sebeok, 1979)*—*, aiming to achieve insights regarding that prompt. Finally, the drawing functions as an interpreter that allows Kunz to

connect her own sphere as a healer with the patient's or illness' sphere, using the diagram's vibratory properties as a medium of connection. At the level of communication, Kunz's method deploys various *shifters*, according to Barthes' (1967) reading of this term: although, for Jakobson (1971), the shifter appears as an intermediary between code and message, Barthes (1967) expands this concept as an intermediary between different languages or substances. Beyond the articulation of word, image, and real, Kunz achieves intertranslations between physical and non-physical and material and vibratory, in the realisation of interlocked complex processes of research and healing. Rather than an end in itself, the drawing is both a point of encounter and a facilitator of encounters, requiring not only a constant reversal of the roles of Enunciator and Enunciatee, but also an interchangeability of utterance [*énoncé*] and enunciation, in a logic in which the meaning of those manifestations is constantly being reconstructed.

From a biosemiotic perspective (see, for example Uexküll, 2013; Sebeok, 1979), however, the necessity for translations indicates that the multiple substances interlocked in the process can be understood as assemblages of different life forms. In that sense, the pendulum constitutes a technology enabling access to insights residing in realms outside our visible/audible spectrum. Geometric forms appear as a common language intersecting the visual, musical, and vibratory, reuniting elements belonging to two (or more) *Umwelten* that intersect and exchange informational insights. In this dynamic, the artist's *Umwelt* can also intersect with the audience's, granting the viewer a visual experience of a set of phenomena otherwise not perceptible. This semiotic reading of "non-figurative" art aligns with Kandinsky's (2000, p. 158) vision of a "new realism": an artistic form that focuses on the inner resonance, and not on how "accurately" a form represents an emotion or thing.

In Kandinsky's (1947, 2000) semiotic system, artworks are not objects, but autonomous entities living by the means of their own internal organisation. It is possible to see, in Kandinsky's prolific theoretical body of work, the same "synaesthesia of signs" attributed to Barthes, in which the search for a "grammar" of painting aligns with Floch's (1985, p. 101) project of a Plastic Semiotics that allows the reader to "hear the *parole*" of the visual signifier. Furthermore, his view on the role of artistic languages is echoed in Lotman's (2013) statements on *artistic cognition* as a form located at the intersection of non-intersecting images of reality. For Kandinsky (2000), art belongs to spiritual life and is one of its most powerful agents, which, in the same fashion as knowledge, constitutes a movement ahead and above. Such a statement evidences Kandinsky's (1947) view on the importance of interlocking "theorising" and "doing"—intersecting the non-intersecting—in a semiotic system homologating colour/form and value, which, in essence, constitutes a structuralist approach to the pictorial substance identifying the value of directionality, rhythm, spiritual and moral values, and orientation. Similar to Kunz and Barthes, not only does Kandinsky's work emerge from the collision of various languages, but the

mutuality of those substances constitutes a circular, holistic system of creation and apprehension of the artwork.

The examples of Barthes, Kunz, and Kandinsky's systems speak of holism and synaesthesia in practices that can only exist as interdisciplinary, through the intimacy and corporeality required in situations where subjects are present "in the act"—whether that means a more pronounced emphasis on the pictorial creation (Kandinsky), theoretical research (Barthes), or simply accessing a phenomenon (Kunz). The semiosis occurring during creation is one that erodes the segregation of specific codes—verbal and non-verbal, as well as the specific substances of the senses—in which, to use Steiner's (2000) image, space is folded to increase its dimensionality. Lotman's view on the opposition between the sensation of explosion versus the ordinary (2013) and Greimas' (1987) analysis of the *dazzlement* and its contrast with the "worn out daily existence" provide a theoretical scope to those instances of intimacy that increase, rather than reduce or flatten, the significance of objects. For Greimas (1987), the markers of this phenomenon reside precisely in the suppression of aspectuality, in which markers of time, space, and person are suspended, creating the effect of an enlarged "now". Such a description is likewise charged with spiritualist overtones that remit to the Zen, Buddhist, and Hinduist theme of "Enlightenment".

The project of conceiving a form (whether textual, pictorial, musical, etc.) emerges as an attempt to paralyse that moment of clarity into a gaugeable entity, which excludes movement, duration, and location. For Kandinsky (2000), although the audience is rarely capable of that level of apprehension, the function of art is precisely to transport the viewer to this state. Barthes (1970, p. 14) talked about the Japan that put him "in a situation of scripture". Through the little verbal register left by Kunz (1953), we know she understood the process of drawings as a cognitive doing, or a process of "making meaning" (Afschar, 2021; Meier *et al.*, 1998). In those three cases, the interlocking of discursive substances appears as a "disponibility" to utter and receive by no matter what means, an act of presence *through* the body that connects, writes, and makes art.

### **The significant universe of *Creation 1-3***

Around 2022, I started to prolifically produce monochromatic drawings using the elements from Zen mandalas—dots, petals, parallel lines, arabesques—, filling concentric circles divided into 36 or 32 sections. My interest in this activity gave me the chance to resume my geometry studies, exploring the structural composition of traditional Yantras, and observing, through working with a compass to create base polygons, the "magic" of dividing a circle. After one year, however, my technique and visual language became stagnant and formulaic, which led me to research sacred geometry artists so as to refresh my visual references. That was the trajectory that introduced me to Emma Kunz. I was the happy owner of an Egyptian pendulum and a few geometric charts and possessed an elementary knowledge of how to

dowse for information using a Bovis Metre<sup>1</sup>, and had done a few experiments using emission boards to imprint subtle energies in water<sup>2</sup>. Reading about Kunz's creation of geometric forms through research in Radiesthesia and their application in medicine also inspired me to resume a more systematic study of Radiesthesia's theory and to experiment with drawing using the pendulum to record answers to specific prompts.

Contrary to Kunz, I am a formally trained artist, and I don't practise Radiesthesia on patients (unless we count my plants...) The significant universes informing what visual and semantic connections each of us could make are equally distinct: I am also a formally trained academic in Semiotics, Art History and Theory, and religious themes such as Sacred Geometry and scriptures. Kunz, on the other hand, was an experienced practitioner who refused to read or to write (or allow others to record or write about her explanations on the drawings), and practised what Szeeman defined as a "comprehensive creative faith" (Meier *et al.*, 1998, p. 58). Equally, our media of choice differ: in place of graph paper and pencil and oil coloured pencils, my previous career as a costume designer made me partial to design illustration tools, such as fine point pens and art markers, and I prefer to start from blank paper. Kunz used the pendulum for an initial orientation, but completed the drawing trusting her "inner eye"; although I can sometimes intuit where the drawing is going, I consult the pendulum for every step: the selection of colours, the partition of the circle, specific lines to be connected, and layers of overlay. Finally, while Kunz drew directly on the final product, I start with a small-scale sketch, whose proportions I study and recreate on A2 paper. Like in Kunz's practice, the drawings often "surprise" me, and there is a time of reflection required.

Not a random selection of a theoretical scope, the focus on Barthes, Kunz, and Kandinsky expresses the significance of them as figures formative of my own "synaesthesia of signs". During my education and practice in the Arts, Kandinsky's pictorial grammar and his understanding of line, form, colour, rhythm, vibration, and value, was the most influential theory guiding my practice. In my transition to an academic career, my approach to research objects and to writing was essentially Barthesian. The distance between researcher and researched is blurred—indeed, I credit my subjective, corporeal

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<sup>1</sup> Introduced by André de Bovis, the Bovis metre consists of a paper, wooden, or PVC plate marked in the Bovis scale, as well as days, hours, minutes, and percentages. The chart was introduced by Bovis as an instrument to measure and improve the vitality of humans, animals, and plants. It can be used to measure the levels of energy and health of different substances and bodies, as well as the compatibility between a person and a substance or object.

<sup>2</sup> Following the works of La Foye (1975) and the Servranx Brothers (1995, 2002), paper, wooden, or PVC plates with specific forms printed on them can be used to impregnate water and objects with the subtle energies that a particular form emanates. Such can include elaborated geometric shapes that resonate with specific functions, as well as number sequences or Hebrew words that contain and emit wave forms. An example is the "High Vitality" plate, created by Harold Oscar Busby, which uses the number sequence "9797979" inside four circles. I conducted experiments watering Basil plants with water influenced by this sequence, which showed a sped-up growth and larger leaves, compared to a seedling from the same plant watered with regular water and exposed to the same soil and amount of sunlight.

experience of objects as the point of differentiation of my semiotic practice—and this syncretism is at the root of a “state of writing” (and analysing) that emerges from this sensitive practice of the object. Finally, it was in this late encounter with Kunz and her method that my research and art practice ceased to be competing forces, to become collaborative, converging, mutually informing engines of insights.

As much as Floch remarks that Barthes’ drawings need to be placed in his semiotic system, my recent pictorial works also emerge from my personal “mythology”, which intersects Geometry, Radionics, and Semiotics. The circle, the chiliagon<sup>3</sup>, and the dekeract<sup>4</sup>, created through connections of points in a circle, are the means of manifesting a solution that is, in its conception, semiotic: a visualisation of an abstract value or relationship. Drawing through this method became, for me, an exercise of problem-solving: like in a *Koan*<sup>5</sup>, looking at the drawing instigates insights, through the creation of a state in which the answer can be found. As much as the overlay of shapes and realised lines are significant, the contemplation of drawings can also draw attention to the unrealised shapes and the meaning of marked absences—another paradoxical instance of “making the invisible visible”. The “net” created in the weave of lines is also different in every drawing, calling for the attention of what particular “chords” are important to the question. Karim (2010) argues that this net was an intentional element of Egyptian paintings, and not a technical requirement for orienting the figures (such as perspective lines in Western painting), representing the web of energy in which we are immersed at all times. In a similar interpretation, Zweg (Meier *et al.*, 1998) perceives the graph paper in Kunz not as a technical necessity, but as the presence of the material plane in the drawing. Throughout my engagement with knowledge in those areas, as well as the appreciation for the meaning of numbers, it is impossible to discard that there is even more meaning in the forms my drawings manifest, which I am still not able to identify<sup>6</sup>.

*Creation 1-3* is a research into the creative process and the aspectual curve that marks the trajectory from idea to realised product. The three drawings—inchoate, durative, and terminative—are roughly verbally describable as *Inspiration*, *Conception*, and *Realisation/Silence*. Rather than words,

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<sup>3</sup> A polygon of a thousand faces inscribed in a circle, which is often invoked by philosophers to illustrate postulates about mental representation. Although my drawings don’t feature realised one thousand partitions of a circle, the number of partitions represents a section of that totality, which corresponds to what portion of it is relevant to the drawing.

<sup>4</sup> A ten-dimensional hyper-cube, it is represented, in two dimensions, through the connections of points in concentric circles. Although the drawings represent only partial sections of the dekeract, at times referring to no more than three or four dimensions, the format in which the drawings are constructed remits to the accumulation of dimensions that can be visualised as movements and in projection beyond the sheet of paper—and not as flat, two-dimensional figures.

<sup>5</sup> Defined as a “paradoxical anecdote without a solution”, the *Koan* is a riddle used in Zen Buddhism as a tool to instigate the necessary mental exercise to achieve Enlightenment.

<sup>6</sup> In discussions about my drawings, friends have remarked on similarities with Astrological charts, as well as the emergence of certain “numerical codes” through the connection (or not) of lines in the circle. It is a future objective of mine to have professionals in Astrology and Numerology analyse the drawings as a means to increase the potential description and interpretation of what is being manifested in the consultation.

however, these are either ideas or sensory experiences. Neither purely artistic, nor purely academic, the series is a collaboration between Semiotics, Radiesthesia, and Art, with the aim of collecting interdisciplinary insights into the theme, resorting to different tools—semiotic elaboration and interpretation of a prompt; research into form waves and vibratory patterns; realisation of insights into a visual form; and (re)realisation of visual insights into written form. The three drawings contain the same circle—whose proportion between medium size and radius is 2.3—and all four circles are divided into 32<sup>7</sup> sections (a number obtained through dowsing). The originals were drawn on A4 cream cartridge paper, using fine point pens, art markers, and white gel pen; the final pieces, recreated on A2 cream cartridge paper, were painted with diluted fountain pen inks, and the lines were applied using fine point and white gel pens.

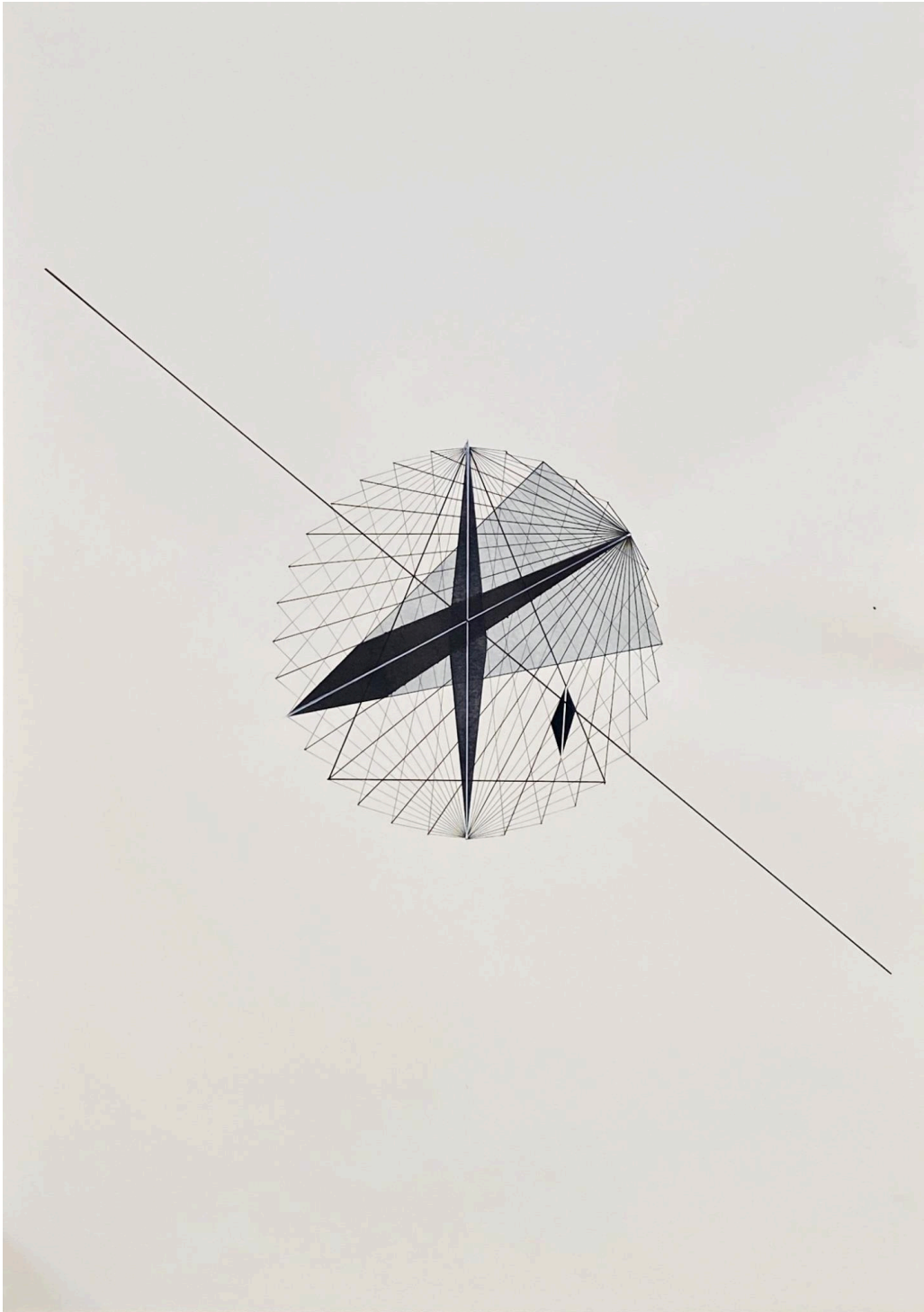
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<sup>7</sup> Zvek (see Meier *et al.*, 1998) identifies the number 32 as one of the recurrent patterns in Emma Kunz's compositions: her designs emerge from the numbers 3 and 4 and their associations (by addition or multiplication), resulting in geometric configurations derived from 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 12, 14, 16, 32, and 64. However, the number 32 also has a special Kabbalistic significance, associated with the *Sefer Yetzirah* (see E. Collé & H. Collé, 2013). The manuscript, attributed to Rabbi Akiva Ben Joseph, is perceived as the origin of the concept of “32 Paths of Wisdom”, which consist of the 10 *sefirot* in the Tree of Life, and the 22 lines connecting them, each associated with one of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The Tree of Life itself, in Kabbalah, is an image of *creation* or *emanation*, describing the path of the Light from the “unlimited” or “undifferentiated” (*Ein Sof*) to the material reality (*Malchut*).

**Creation 1: Inspiration. *Direction from the outside***

**Figure 1**

*Creation 1 - Inspiration (2024)*



Elaborated by the author.

*Inspiration* (Figure 1) began with the circle crossed by a thick black line bisecting it from, and towards the outside in the oblique, from the top right to the bottom left<sup>8</sup>. Its 32 sections formed a weave of the finest black lines radiating from point 1<sup>9</sup> (top centre) and 17 (bottom centre). Medium black lines radiate from point 6 (upper left) to all points, and from point 23 (lower right) to 3 and 9, forming a rhomb. The thicker black lines connect 1, 13, and 21, forming a triangle. In this weave, the pendulum firstly indicated the overlay of the large light grey rhomb, secondly the dark grey central rhomb, thirdly the arrow-shaped rhomb in darkest grey and, lastly, the small black rhomb in the lower left section. The last components to appear were the three white lines that bisect the four overlaid shapes.

In the process of contemplation, the intersection of white and black lines at the centre caused me to visualise the shapes as “animated”: the white lines in the vertical (height) and oblique (depth) are crossed by a fourth axis, coming from the outside, which crosses all the shapes throughout its duration. This fourth line relates to the fourth axis that permits the simulation of four-dimensional rotations in software such as *Blender*. The horizontal axis—which, in Kunz’s system, is associated with moral categories and the human world (see Afschar, 2021; Althaus *et al.*, 2018; Meier *et al.*, 1998; Zegher & Teicher, 2005)—is not connected, only suggested by the weave. Through the articulation of the three axes that are drawn, the polygons laid in the two-dimensional space of the drawing create the perspective illusion of planes in movement, which could suggest the rotations of the hypersphere and the passage of the centre through the fourth dimension.

In Steiner’s (2000) Anthroposophical work, the fourth dimension is associated with that which creates movement in space: not only time, but empathy and self-awareness. From the perspective of a three-dimensional existence, the elements of the fourth dimension are experienced as “action from the outside”, which is a central theme in the semiotic theories of experience. The strong phenomenological inclination of the late Greimas (1987) and his investigations of the aesthetic emotion and *esthesis*, for example, invite magical themes into his semiotics such as the idea of the *dazzlement* as a phenomenon suspending the markers of time and space to locate the experiencer into an enlarged “now”—a statement that rhymes with perceptions of sections of time described by Juri Lotman (1990, 2009) as not organised linearly, but in an eternal now in which vertical synchronic sections are “stacked”. It is possible to grasp a

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<sup>8</sup> I accept Kandinsky’s understanding of the basic plan as a “living entity”, which must be described as we would an animal or person (and not an image)—thus, like in an interaction with another subject, the right side of the artwork corresponds to the left side of the reader. Secondly, the description of directions and order of elements are faithful to the sequence of pendulum gestures during the consultation.

<sup>9</sup> In the dowsed sketches, the circles are marked, like in a clock, with each point corresponding to a number. The beginning of the scale is the top central point (1), and the points are numbered clockwise.

marked correspondence of these postulates with Buddhism, Zen, and Hinduism, as well as the Kabbalistic and Rosicrucian understanding of the “plasticity” of reality and the construct of time.

The interlocked dark grey shapes suggest directionality and the arrows of a compass, either indicating two-dimensional coordinates (the lower right) or marking the three-dimensional movement between the background and the viewer, again suggesting the passage through the centre that characterises four-dimensional movement. This image of orientation refers to the French word *sens*: beyond “sense” or “meaning”, it also encompasses the *sensory, sensation, intuition, immediate knowledge, judgement, discernment, reason, wisdom, significance, direction, and position*, in a multilayered meaning that intersects secular and spiritual vocabularies. The idea of exterior elements as a principle of *transcendence* (see the definition by Greimas & Courtés, 1993) interfering with the linguistic, semiotic, cultural, or spiritual processes contains in itself the idea of *sens* as *direction*: it nudges the subject (or process) receiving it into a specific trajectory from which a series of processes can unfold. The overlaid light grey rhomb behind the “compass” suggests yet a second ambivalent movement related to inspiration: it can be either *narrowing* towards one goal or *widening* the possibilities of the subject, depending on what direction we choose to start the reading from. Paradoxically, to be on the receiving end of inspiration causes the subject to be caught in both directions simultaneously; rather than an external observer of this phenomenon, it is possible to place the “receiver” at the centre of the shape, where the moving parts either interlock or originate from.

In that reading, the drawing captures the four-dimensional space contained in Lotman’s (2013) description of inspiration: a moment of creative, emotional, and intellectual tension, whose explosive resolution transforms the untranslatable into translatability. However, this force too must be translated, as it doesn’t yet make sense as a realised form. In this dynamic, the act of semiosis consists of the interpretation or translation of what the inspiration is trying to enact. At the level of the *Umwelt* (see the definition by Uexküll, 2013), the experience of contact with a transcendent force is corporeal, perceived through chained reactions that constitute the feeling of insight: a sudden moment of pause in all the processes followed by a “realignment”—in the drawing, the harmonisation of the “north” (position 1) and “south” (position 17) with the two obliques, making distinctive shapes. In the coherence resulting from the alignment of the four dimensional axes, the clarity of inspiration sections the two-dimensional shapes in half, exposing their higher dimensionality by suggesting the possibility of “folding” them from the centre<sup>10</sup>.

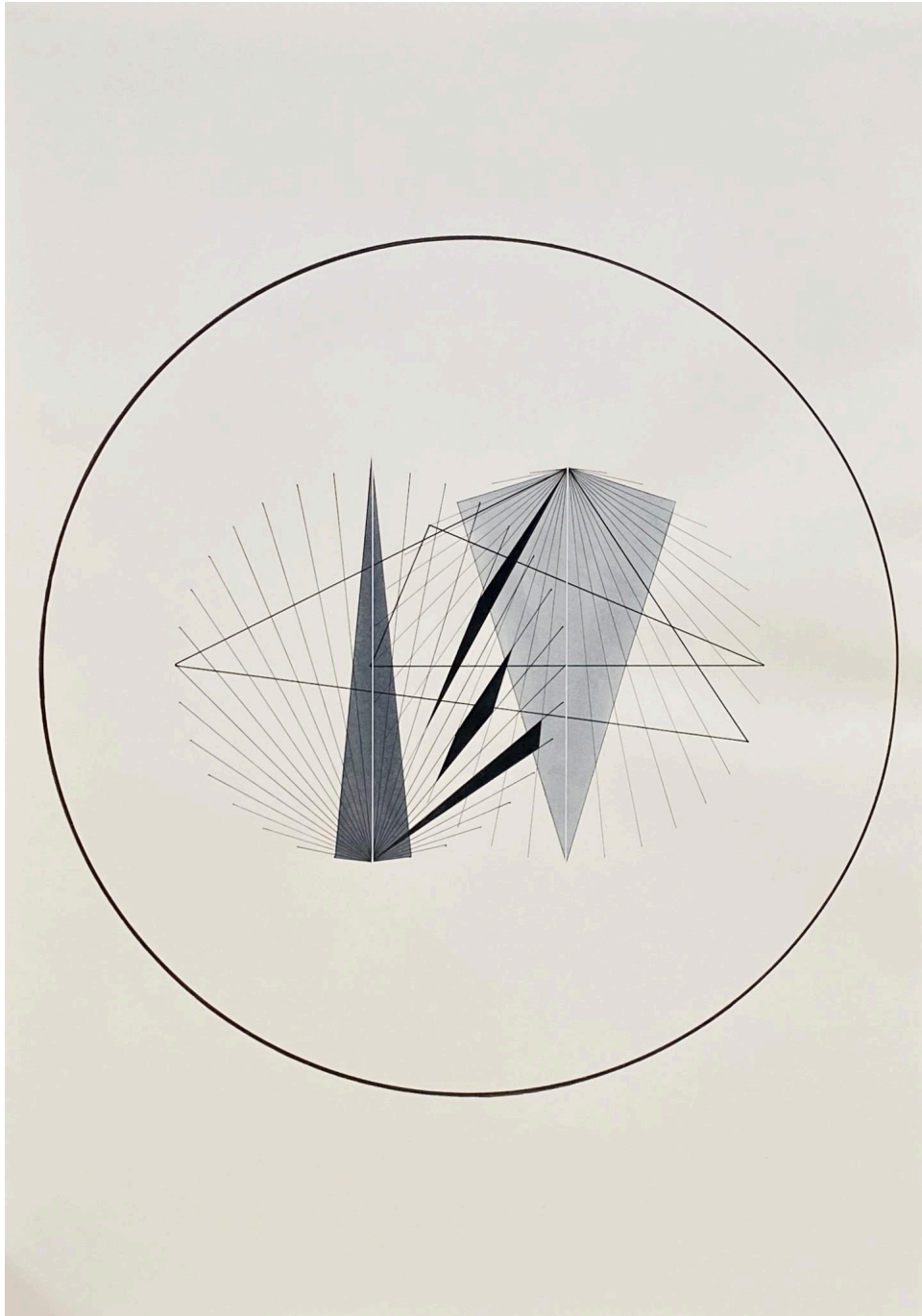
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<sup>10</sup> In *The Fourth Dimension*, Rudolf Steiner (2000) explains the mathematical theory of how the next higher dimension is gained through folding the space. For example, a sheet of paper can represent a two-dimensional plane; if the paper is folded in half, and one of the halves is lifted at a 90° angle, the sheet of paper now constitutes a three-dimensional space. The continued effort to “fold” spaces is what constitutes the passage to the next higher

**Creation 2: Conception. *Explosion and translation***

**Figure 2**

*Creation 2 - Conception (2024)*



Elaborated by the author.

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dimensions, all the way to the 10th—which, both in Mathematics and Spiritual traditions, is understood as the last dimension.

The second piece, *Conception* (Figure 2), started with two interlocked circles—first the one on the left, then the one on the right, forming a *vesica piscis*—both divided into 32 sections. A third shape was indicated: the large outlined black circle with a radius 2.2 times larger than the two circles. The weave created from the intersection of lines from point 1 and point 17 in *Inspiration* appears here as bisected: the finest black lines from point 1 occupy the left shape, whereas the ones from point 17 occupy the right shape, now thickened into medium lines. The two triangles, formed by the thicker black lines, also seem to suggest “possibilities” in the perspective and orientation of the same triangle in the previous drawing. The overlaid shapes repeat these variations of shapes from *Inspiration*: the light grey rhomb now points downwards, and the medium grey rhomb is distorted, causing it to appear as an almost triangular shape. The three black shapes in the centre also appear to be distorted, originating in the space where lines from opposing directions intersect. Finally, there is a repetition of white lines bisecting the two larger polygons.

The enclosed *vesica piscis* invokes the theme of intertextuality, and what happens at the border of texts: the distorted black polygons and the outlined triangles connect the two spheres in four directions, but, unlike in *Inspiration*, they do not yet (or no longer) cohere as four aligned axes. With each circle being formed by lines radiating from only one point, the shapes have no boundaries and appear, to an extent, to be about to disintegrate: an image in correspondence with Lotman’s (2009, 2013) concept of *explosion* as an encounter in which systems are “dismantled” so as to constitute a new, third system. An image for the development of significant systems, as well as for the process of translation, Lotman’s (1990, 2009, 2013) concept of explosion is also a metaphor for the process of conception of the artwork, in which various spheres compete for the (seemingly) single space of the finalised product. In the case of the visual arts, abstract concepts aim to find their way as manifested linguistic, iconic or material substances.

The theme of duality in this piece seems to refer to the primordial contrast of masculine vs feminine forces that collide to create. In their directionality and spatiality, each sphere embodies those forces. With only one set of lines, the almost “insubstantial” forms suggest dissolution in a process that can be read as either the dissection of the elements from *Inspiration* in its constituent parts or the clash of one sphere with its mirrored double. Although the verbal prompt for the drawing was *Conception*, favouring the interpretation of the *vesica piscis* as fertilisation, cell mitosis is also conception by division: indeed, the sacred meaning of the interlocked circles links to the paradox of how 1 becomes 3: it is either through the division of 1 into 2 so that it can relate (3); or in the encounter of 1 and 1, which becomes a relation (3, not 2). In both cases, the shape is about union: either the integration of external forces that collide with the system or the resolution of colliding internal forces, generating the “creative spark” that

conceives. In the zone of encounter, where the connection of lines in opposing directions creates a denser weave from which overlaid planes are formed, as well as in the outlined triangles that “reach out” to the other sphere, something is being “exchanged” through a common grid, containing lines from both spheres that connect with one another at certain points.

Although made of similar elements, the intersecting spheres are radically “different”—they are, in fact, an almost *reversed* version of the other. Their union is a manifestation of directional opposition: a zone of folding that creates the visual illusion of dimensionality, in which the shapes appear to occupy a different plane—the third way, the third language, or the mystical 3 that is the result of union. The zone in which this third force can be conceived is the “distorted field” where boundaries intersect and lines (the second dimension) become planes (the third dimension): a dangerous space where translations and resignifications must occur, and from which incompatibilities emerge.

Finally, the distorted zone of translation can also be interpreted as the passage from *Umwelt* to *Innenwelt*. According to Sebeok (1979), this passage originates signs that permit elements of the environment (*Umwelt*) to be imprinted, in the subject’s inner world (*Innenwelt*), as a sign substance. This process constitutes an instance of mediation in which both systems—the inner and outer, or both languages in the process of acculturation required by translation or, yet, both substances, in the case of translating an idea into an artwork—are dismantled and reconstituted into a different substance. Although this third form shares elements with the “original”, the former is not a “version” of the latter: it is a new process made from pieces of the original system, but the meaning, the form, as well as the manifestation, are changed. *Conception* can be read as a visual manifestation of this process, in which the intersecting core of the shape constitutes the third space that is not linear but invested with higher dimensionality. The two-dimensional, linear descriptions found in theories of translation actually refer to phenomena occurring in three, four, or higher dimensions. The drawing, thus, seems to communicate this struggle between flat systems, and phenomena occurring at higher dimensions. Rather than the distortion of phenomena to fit in flat models, creation requires the distortion of models to regain dimensionality.

**Creation 3: Realisation/Silence. *The renunciation of dimensionality***

**Figure 3**

*Creation 3 - Realisation/Silence (2024)*



Elaborated by the author.

The final drawing, *Realisation/Silence* (Figure 3), appears as the most “two-dimensional” of the series, suppressing all references to elements from the outside. The same circle with the 32 sections is reiterated; this time, however, the weave of shapes is made of the interlocking of connections radiating from point 17 to all points, but only half of the lines radiating from point 1 are present. As a first indication of either “loss” from the previous shapes, or anteriority to their higher complexity, the composition of lines continues the narrative from *Conception*, in which the lines from point 17 increase in thickness, becoming more visible than the lines radiating from point 1. Secondly, a series of thicker black lines form four outlined triangles nested on point 9 (mid-left), and an extra set of thicker black lines connects points 27, 9, and 23, but that shape is not closed by lines on the right. This polygon is overlaid in light grey, which creates correspondence with the rhomboidal shape of the same colour in the two previous drawings. Unlike in *Inspiration* and *Conception*, however, *Realisation* contains mostly triangles filled in grey and black—with the exception of the solitary black rhomb, appearing in the same quadrant as *Inspiration* and also bisected by a white line; here, however, its orientation is changed. While the previous drawings possess an isotopy of four-sided polygons, here the number three dominates. Finally, a triangle of white lines cuts through the weave and shapes, almost suggesting the presence of an “invisible form”.

*Realisation/Silence* plays with the radical transformation of elements appearing in the two previous drawings, distorting perspective and orientation, while reducing the elements to their elementary forms. The only represented axes are height and width, asserting the conformity of the shape with the two-dimensional medium. There is a certain organisation, suggested by the nested outlined triangles in thick black and white lines, but the coherence is flat and contained. Without rotation or forces from the outside, the mandala showcases the silent “aftermath of the explosion”: elements from *Inspiration* were disassembled and selected in *Conception*, and the result, here, is a rearrangement of existing elements in configurations that cause the emergence of new forms. To an extent, the effect of “collage” and “multidirectionality” introduced by the black polygons refers to the distinction Floch (2001) makes between *bricolage* and the *bricolage style* as a contrast of authentic and intentionally simulated forms. In the context of an artwork, this outcome accompanies any process of realisation. To reach outside the ideal realm of inspiration requires an intentional effort to make incompatibilities compatible—whether that means selecting appropriate substances of expression or constituting signs that can mediate between significant or living spheres.

Although the composition in weaves and planes can also create the visual illusion of three-dimensional movement, here the assertion of a fourth (or even third) dimension is absent. In the progression through the three drawings, a paradox of communication is represented. In each step,

although there is an expansion that comes from the contact between the various substances, significant levels, and spheres involved in the act of creation, there is also a loss of “depth”, with each drawing *unfolding* dimensions to accommodate the process. To bring something to full realisation is to flatten it, to bring it to the manageable, fully perceptible realm of two-dimensionality—whether that is the literal sheet of paper, or an ideological two-dimensionality, aimed at making the idea or work “accessible”.

The progression manifested in the reorganisation of shapes across the three drawings reflects the same loss of dimensionality in communication and the series of translations required by it. Indeed, Floch (1985) remarked that, for Barthes, drawing and writing constitute semiotic operations of denial, marked by the prevalence of *de-* words in his writing: *detach*, *deform*, *displace*. Although, for the individual, there can be an increased complexification of sense in the act of communication, the partaken space of exchange or interaction will tend to a de-complexification that is necessary so that meaning can be shared. Such errors of translation go hand in hand with the biosemiotic theme of misinformation in the passage from *Umwelt* to *Innenwelt* (Sebeok, 1979), as well as with the possibility of interchangeability of turns in the act of enunciation (see Greimas & Courtés, 1993).

On the other hand, the losses in this drawing can also be homologated to the problem of reception—both by the “receiver”, the artist executing their inspiration, or by the “viewer”, the external subject who apprehends the product of an exchange between the artist and some form of transcendent substance. The absence of the even lines radiating from point 1, which now only connects with the odd numbers, is particularly significant: in the section above, the shape formed by lines radiating from point 1 in *Conception* was identified with the feminine force which, in religious traditions, is the negative or receptive actant. This progressive increase and prevalence of the masculine form over the feminine can be read as the triumph of *action* over *inspiration* in realised forms: they are flattened and somehow displaced from the initial gesture, as the outcome of doing—versus feeling or being. The infinite “nothingness” associated with the feminine creative power is replaced by the narrow, bounded, and directional masculine that executes by reduction—an interesting image to the process occurring in the sciences and epistemologies as well, and the loss of holism that accompanies the process of delimiting a research object and communicating results in forms that, often, *flatten* phenomena.

### **Conclusion**

Beyond its project of analysing processes of semiosis that are, in essence, *creative acts*, Semiotics as a field of enquiry is a creative discipline, whose processes invite a circularity or mutuality between the text and its apprehender. In Greimas’ (1986) proposition of a method, we find a mechanism of description that, in the efforts to exhaust the object, enacts its increase: each layer uncovers new relations that must be incorporated in the description, instigating an analytical process in which the description of meaning *generates* more meaning. Like in artistic practice, this paradoxical “reduction that increases” is also a

driver of tensions that can generate explosive processes that, given some poetic licence, mark the birth of artistic forms.

Emma Kunz's (1953) new method of drawing—alongside Barthes' "synaesthesia of signs" (Floch, 1985), Kandinsky's (1947, 2000) grammar of pictorial composition and, even, Annie Beasant's (1905) "thought forms"—offers a paradigmatic case for the unique position of art and its processes in the orchestration of syncretisms between languages or substances of expression, as well as between systems of knowledge. The generative analysis of *Creation 1-3* demonstrates the extrapolation of theory through the investigation and visual manifestation of vibratory insights as a part of the theoretical problem-solving process, opening up the possibility of interrogating the extent to which art is a fundamental piece in the process of creation across disciplines—and not only in the Humanities. Furthermore, the integration of Kunz's method of drawing alongside Semiotics reveals that this transdiscipline also possesses a processual status that approximates it to art forms. Beyond its application as a "tool of analysis", particularly through the images invoked by Lotman and Uexküll and the analytical method outlined by Greimas, semiosis and its theoretical articulation as a semiotic theory are processes of meaning-creation, whose apparatus can also support experimentation and the testing of ideas—and not only the processing of finished utterances.

Beyond the instrumental use of Semiotics to read manifestations, my recent pedagogical work on interdisciplinary collaboration touches upon similar themes of integration of semiotic paradigms, and the articulation of various forms of modelling that govern not only language and cultural interactions, but our professional ethics and methods for realisation (Jardim, preprint). In the case study informing that contribution, I argue for artistic creation as a fundamental piece of *any* creative endeavour, presenting a pedagogical model envisioned not to "include" Semiotics as part of the course content, but *through* semiotic theories as generative tools. The insights in the present manuscript complete that reflection by addressing the extent to which artistic exploration, academic research, and pedagogy interlock and converge in my own transdisciplinary practice.

Amidst the discussions about automation and the delegation of all processes to technical and technological forms, reflecting on the unique, "magical" character of creation becomes more urgent than ever. One of my graduates once remarked on the closeness between Kunz's method of drawing and prompting generative AI, which led us to conclude that, intentionally or not, every execution of an artwork is "prompting". While the interaction with a Large Language Model makes this process literal to an almost obscene degree, the "analogue" creative process is also, from a semiotic perspective, a chain of prompting guiding the successive transition between an "idea" and a "finished product". Massimo Leone (2024) notes this connection between technology and religion as seemingly distinct manifestations of similar values—which invites the discussion of what creation *is*. For the dictionary, "the action or process

of bringing something into existence”—an operation we associate with Gods and the transcendent fluxes that seem to guide this process. The theories discussed in this manuscript mark the passage, in Greimas, Lotman, and Uexküll, from a binary understanding of those forces to theories that recognise the otherworldly, transcendent attributes of the generation and apprehension of meaning—a passage that, perhaps, can only be understood through artistic (co)creation.

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