

GRIMOIRE (AQC0571): A Philosophical Research Note

Arnaud Quercy

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Philosophical investigation of GRIMOIRE sculpture through Peircean semiotics, Schellingian dialectics, and ideamorphism—exploring the liminal territory where symbolic representation and operative formula converge in magical language.

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by Arnaud Quercy — 2026-02-18

A philosophical investigation of the sculpture GRIMOIRE through Peircean semiotics, Schellingian dialectics, and the concept of ideamorphism—examining the liminal territory where symbolic representation and operative formula converge.

The grimoire—the magician's book of spells—occupies a unique position in the relationship between language and power. Unlike ordinary texts where words represent ideas, magical formulae are believed to *enact* transformation through their very structure. The spell works not because it symbolizes power but because its arrangement constitutes power properly configured.

GRIMOIRE (AQC0571) takes this principle as its sculptural subject. The work does not perform systematic transliteration (as in the artist's chromesthetic series) but rather depicts the *idea* of such transformation. The geometric forms ascending from the open book—prism, hexagon, oval—symbolize spell-formulae: love, eternal youth, transformation rendered as abstract shapes.

This positions the work at what the artist calls "the edge of symbolism—not arbitrary representation but depiction of the very idea that form can enact meaning." The grimoire historically occupies this liminal territory where symbol and operative formula converge.

The Liminal Territory Between Symbol and Operative Formula

This research note examines the sculpture GRIMOIRE through the philosophical frameworks of Peircean semiotics, Schellingian dialectics as interpreted by Slavoj Žižek, and the concept of ideamorphism. The work occupies a liminal territory where symbolic representation and operative formula converge, embodying the moment of transformation when language becomes power.

Through analysis of its compositional structure, material properties, and conceptual framework, this note argues that GRIMOIRE constitutes a meditation on the performative dimension of magical language and the passage from the pre-symbolic Real to the universe of logos.

Introduction: The Grimoire as Philosophical Problem

The grimoire as philosophical subject occupies a unique position in the relationship between language and power. Unlike ordinary texts where words represent ideas, magical formulae are believed to *enact* transformation through their very structure. The spell works not because it symbolizes power but because its arrangement constitutes power properly configured.

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Peircean Semiotics and the Modi Significandi

Speculative Grammar and the Modes of Signifying

Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of signs provides a rigorous framework for understanding GRIMOIRE's philosophical stakes. In his mature work, particularly as documented in Francesco Bellucci's *Peirce's Speculative Grammar: Logic as Semiotics*, Peirce developed the concept of speculative grammar—the study of sign classifications that precedes logical criticism.

Medieval grammarians (the Modistae) distinguished between significatum (the lexical meaning of a word) and consignificatum (the grammatical properties or modi significandi). Peirce adapted this framework: signs signify their objects not through all their features, but in virtue of some particular feature.

This is precisely the operational principle of GRIMOIRE—the geometric forms do not represent specific incantations but function as visual equivalents of incantatory language itself: the abstract structure of magical formulae rendered in ceramic volume.

The Triadic Structure of Signs

Peirce's fundamental insight—that signs consist of three inter-related parts—illuminates the sculpture's structure. The sign-vehicle (the ascending geometric forms), the object (the concept of transformation, of spell-formulae as abstract operations), and the interpretant (the understanding generated in the viewer of how form can enact meaning) together constitute the sign's complete functioning.

The crucial point is that for Peirce, signification is not a simple dyadic relationship between sign and object: a sign signifies only in being interpreted. GRIMOIRE embodies this triadic structure: the geometric forms signify transformation only through the interpretant's grasp of their systematic progression from page to air.

Icons, Indices, and Symbols: The Liminal Space

Peirce's classification of signs provides vocabulary for GRIMOIRE's liminal position. Icons are signs that resemble their object (portraits, diagrams). Indices are signs existentially connected to their object (smoke and fire, weathervane and wind). Symbols are signs that function conventionally (words, traffic signals).

As Peirce's theory matured, he recognized that it would be hard, if not impossible, to find any pure instances of icons and indices. Rather, most signs display some combination of iconic, indexical and symbolic characteristics.

GRIMOIRE operates precisely in this hybrid space. The geometric forms are iconic (they visually suggest qualities of refinement and ascension), indexical (they physically emerge from the book-base, causally linked to it), and symbolic (they conventionally represent the abstract structure of spell-language).

This tripartite nature embodies the grimoire's historical position where symbol and operative formula converge—neither purely arbitrary representation nor purely natural sign, but a mode of signification that claims to *structurally preserve* the transformative power it represents.

Ideamorphism and Structural Preservation

The artist introduces the concept of **ideamorphism** to describe this mode of signification: operative ideamorphism where form structurally preserves meaning across modalities. This distinguishes GRIMOIRE from conventional symbolism (where form arbitrarily rep-

resents meaning) and systematic transliteration (where one modality is mechanically converted to another, as in the artist's chromesthetic works).

Instead, ideamorphism suggests a mode where form can enact meaning—where the structure of the sign is not merely conventional but operatively connected to what it signifies. This is the grimoire's historical claim: that properly configured language *is* power, not merely its representation.

Schelling and the Passage from the Pre-Symbolic to Logos

Žižek's Reading: The Primordial Act

Slavoj Žižek's analysis of F.W.J. Schelling in *The Indivisible Remainder* provides a philosophical framework for understanding GRIMOIRE's compositional narrative. According to Žižek, Schelling's *Weltalter* drafts attempt to articulate the passage from the pre-symbolic pulsation of the real to the universe of logos.

The key Schellingian moment is the pronunciation of the Word (*Wort*) that breaks the rotary motion of drives—the chaotic, pre-symbolic circulation of forces—and establishes temporal succession and meaningful difference. Prior to the Word there is the chaotic-psychotic universe of blind drives, their rotary motion, their undifferentiated pulsating; and the Beginning occurs when the Word is pronounced which represses, rejects into the eternal Past, this self-enclosed circuit of drives.

GRIMOIRE's Compositional Structure as Schellingian Narrative

The sculpture's vertical composition directly enacts this Schellingian passage. The open book (base) represents knowledge at the threshold of action, the moment before formula becomes effect—the pre-symbolic potentiality. The ascending forms trace the geometric progression from prism to hexagon to oval, tracing the path of spoken magic rising from page to air. The spatial narrative moves from ground to sky, page to air.

This is precisely Schelling's structure: the Word emerges from the dark ground, breaks the rotary motion, and establishes linear progression. The sculpture visualizes what Žižek calls the true Beginning—not a temporal first moment, but the passage from the closed rotary motion to open progress, from drive to desire—or, in Lacanian terms, from the Real to the Symbolic.

The Rhodium Surface: Revelation and Concealment

The material choice—rhodium enamel creating a matte gray with subtle metallic luminosity—embodies the grimoire's dialectical nature. The grimoire as repository of hidden knowledge appropriately bears a finish that reveals and conceals simultaneously, its gray luminosity suggesting depths beneath the visible surface.

This material dialectic resonates with Schelling's concept of the Ground (*Grund*): the obscure, impenetrable foundation that withdraws into itself the moment it is illuminated by reason. The rhodium surface thus functions as visual metaphor for the grimoire's epistemological status: knowledge that is simultaneously disclosed and withheld, present and withdrawn, revealed in its very concealment.

The Liminal as Constitutive

For both Schelling and the artist, the liminal state is not merely transitional but constitutive. Žižek emphasizes that Schelling's position is intermediate not as a flaw but as its very power—a kind of vanishing mediator between the Idealism of the Absolute and the post-Hegelian universe of finitude.

Similarly, GRIMOIRE does not resolve the tension between symbol and operative formula, between representation and enactment. Rather, it occupies and depicts this tension as the grimoire's essential character. The work positions itself at the boundary between conventional symbolism (where form arbitrarily represents meaning) and operative ideamorphism (where form structurally preserves meaning across modalities).

Performativity and the Three Grades of Signification

Austin and Magical Language

J.L. Austin's distinction between constative and performative utterances provides another entry point. Constative utterances describe states of affairs (they can be true or false); performative utterances *do* things (pronouncing marriage, making promises in the appropriate context).

Magical formulae claim an extreme form of performativity: not merely social acts (like promising or marrying) but metaphysical transformations. The spell does not describe transformation—it enacts it through its proper utterance and configuration.

Peirce's Three Interpretants and Magical Efficacy

Peirce's late division of the interpretant illuminates the grimoire's claim to efficacy. The immediate interpretant is the schema in imagination, the vague image of what the sign signifies—recognition of spell-form. The dynamic interpretant is the actual effect which the sign, as a sign, really determines—the transformation claimed to occur. The final interpretant is that which would finally be decided to be the true interpretation if consideration of the matter were carried so far that an ultimate opinion were reached—complete actualization of the spell's power.

The magical claim is that in properly executed spells, these three collapse: immediate recognition directly becomes actual effect, which is the final realization. There is no gap between understanding and efficacy—the sign functions indexically even while being symbolic.

The Vertical Progression as Interpretive Cascade

GRIMOIRE's ascending composition visualizes this interpretive cascade. The prism (bottom) is complex and angular—the immediate encounter with the formula's structure. The hexagon (middle) is consolidated, more refined—the dynamic interpretation taking shape. The oval (top) is smooth resolution—the final interpretant, effect achieved.

The geometric progression abstracts this principle: shapes succeeding shapes, each more refined than the last, tracing the path from written formula to released effect.

The Internal Armature: Structural Necessity and Hidden Support

Technical Specification as Philosophical Metaphor

The sculpture's internal metal armature—capable of withstanding 1300°C firing temperatures—provides structural support invisible in the finished work. This technical necessity becomes philosophical metaphor: the grimoire's power requires hidden infrastructure.

The armature remains invisible in the finished work but is essential to its existence. This parallels the grimoire's epistemological structure: magical knowledge claims visible effects through invisible operations, manifest power through occult mechanisms.

Schelling's Ground and the Necessity of Support

This structure resonates with Schelling's insistence on the Ground as necessary support for existence. Žižek explains that for Schelling, every power structure is necessarily split, inconsistent; there is a crack in the very foundation of its edifice.

The grimoire's power—both literally (the sculpture's vertical stability) and metaphorically (magical efficacy)—depends on a hidden support that cannot be fully displayed without collapsing the structure itself. The enchainment (*Verkettung*) Schelling describes finds literal realization in the metal tube linking base to crown.

Synthesis: GRIMOIRE as Philosophical Investigation

Three Convergent Frameworks

This research note has examined GRIMOIRE through three philosophical lenses. Through Peircean Semiotics, the work explores *modi significandi*—modes of signification that occupy the liminal space between icon, index, and symbol, proposing ideamorphism as a mode where form structurally (not arbitrarily) conveys meaning.

Through Schellingian Dialectics, the ascending composition enacts the passage from the pre-symbolic chaos of drives to the symbolic order of language and meaning—the moment when the Word breaks the rotary motion and establishes temporal progression.

Through Performative Theory, the sculpture investigates magical language's claim to collapse representation and enactment, where properly configured signs don't merely signify transformation but accomplish it.

The Liminal as Method

The work's philosophical contribution lies not in resolving these tensions but in occupying and depicting them. The goal is not to eliminate ambiguity but to map the modes of signifying that constitute semiotic possibility.

GRIMOIRE similarly maps the grimoire's historical and conceptual position: neither pure symbol nor pure operation, but a mode of signification that claims structural rather than arbitrary connection between sign and power.

Contemporary Relevance

In an era increasingly dominated by code (computational, genetic, legal), where properly configured symbolic structures claim to directly *enact* effects in

the world, the grimoire's philosophical problem becomes newly urgent. GRIMOIRE invites reflection on the relationship between symbolic representation and operational efficacy, the claim that certain structural configurations possess inherent power, the passage from potential to actual (from formula to effect), and the role of hidden infrastructure in enabling visible manifestation.

Conclusion: The Spell as Vanishing Mediator

In Žižek's reading of Schelling, certain philosophical moments function as vanishing mediators—they are visible for a brief moment, as it were in a flash, before withdrawing into invisibility. The grimoire's spell occupies such a position: the moment of transformation where language becomes power, where symbolic order emerges from the pre-symbolic Real.

GRIMOIRE captures this fleeting moment in ceramic permanence. The open book, the rising forms, the achievement of the oval apex—frozen mid-transformation, perpetually on the threshold where formula becomes effect.

The work thus functions as what Schelling called a philosophical deed: not merely representing philosophical problems but enacting philosophical investigation through form itself. In depicting the idea that form can enact meaning, GRIMOIRE *demonstrates* this claim—the sculpture's ascending composition doesn't merely represent transformation but structures our encounter with it, guiding interpretation from base to crown, from inscription to release.

The final paradox: in materializing the grimoire's claim to immaterial power, in giving permanent form to the moment of transformation, the sculpture simultaneously affirms and suspends magical efficacy. The spell is eternally *about to* be released, perpetually on the verge—which is perhaps the only form in which the grimoire's philosophical problem can be adequately posed.

The book opens; the formula ascends; the spell releases—but in the sculptural medium, this release is forever deferred, held in the rhodium-gray luminosity that reveals and conceals, manifests and withdraws. The grimoire remains what it has always been: knowledge at the threshold, power on the verge, transformation suspended in the moment before it becomes actual.