

Symbols in Magic: Tools for Transforming Reality

Original Study

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Abstract: The following paper focuses on the role and function of symbols in magical practice. The first part explains the symbol as a semiotic term with all its fundamental features, including the necessary function and condition of ordinary communication. The next section deals with symbols that fulfill the essential role of transforming reality within the framework of magical practice. Examples of sigil magic, Tarot, and amulets explain the paradigm, which uses symbolic language as a mandatory condition for its existence and simultaneously ignores the shared awareness of the origin of the symbol as a constitutional element of its functionality. This paper demonstrates how the symbols used in everyday communication and the symbols used in magical practice are two different entities performing distinct kinds of function, and primarily that they differ in requirements for being created and functional.

Keywords: Magic, Symbol, Sigil, Tarot, Amulet, Card Shuffling, Linearity, Simultaneity, Combinatoriality, Semiotics

INTRODUCTION

When it comes to magic, what comes to most people's minds are obscure practices shrouded in mystery that are allowed to be glimpsed only by a few chosen ones. Magical symbols, alchemical signs, mysterious names of demonic or divine spirits, and incantations of supernatural entities attract public interest in arts, books, legends, and folklore ever since human cognitive tools were adapted enough to provide abstract imagination to a mankind.

Charles Sanders Peirce was convinced that faith in the supernatural is fading out due to the so-called enlightenment of humanity. He described belief in the supernatural as decadent and claimed that: "Common sense is coming to reject the doctrine, good sense does reject it" (Peirce 1994, s.v. 6.577, 6.578). To support this, he pointed out the fact that humanity has shifted its paradigm from astrology to astronomy; from magic to medicine; and last but not least, from alchemy to chemistry (Peirce 1994, s.v. 1.226). This discourse of 'legitimate' science remains to this day, and one of its fundamental components remains the polemical opposition to the irrationality of superstition (Hanegraaff 2005, 245).

Although magic is different from scientific knowledge, the contrast between magic and science is not as abysmal

as between magic and religion, or science and religion. Undoubtedly, magic and religion share many common procedures and superstitious beliefs; yet magic seeks to tame and subdue the supernatural – to make a pact and collaborate with it; religion offers adoration and respect in the form of subordination. Magical thinking can resonate with scientific practices more than it may seem, on the grounds that "it is based on an almost instinctive empiricism and tries to impose order on the world" (Gordon and Simón 2010, 569).

Although "science's approach to theory is falsification, but magic's approach is relation" (Dunn 2008, 2), both use inference to access knowledge. While inferences and references to instrumentation, representations, and specific theories and concepts in which the inferential systems were anchored are hard to learn, the symbolic hardware is more perceptible and persuasive in society (Asprem 2013, 16).

Magical practices are interwoven with concepts remarkably abstract; thus, for the ideas to be shared and experienced, seemingly the only coherent language must be immensely symbolic. Consequently, there is nothing suspicious about magical fallacy or mystery, since every language is symbolic. However, the uniqueness of magical symbols lies in their constitution and

habit; symbols used in everyday communication and the symbols used in magical practice are two different entities performing different kinds of functions – primarily they differ in the requirements for being functional, which will be explained on the example of sigils, Tarot, and amulets.

The aim of this paper is to dive deeper into this abnormality. Since magic is not a distant, isolated, and obscure oddity, but rather an exotic and stigmatized phenomenon, which uses similar ways for accessing reality as many other worldviews, the tools for clarifying the abnormal usage of symbolic language will be linguistics and semiotics. The main theoretical background of this paper consists of the triadic model of the sign from Charles Sanders Peirce, followed by Umberto Eco's concept of codes, which I consider to be the most suitable approach to clarifying the discussed issue, especially for the three examples demonstrated below, as they cover all the dimensions necessary to understand the paradigm of magical symbolism – connotation, denotation, intention, embodiment, and secret coding, along with the concept of linearity defined by Ferdinand de Saussure, as it plays a significant role in the construction of magical symbols and the decoding process.

SYMBOLS IN SEMIOTICS

A symbol is a sign whose components are connected arbitrarily, conventionally, or by an agreement (Eco 1976, 16). It is an image of a signified idea, memory, individual event, person, or anything associated either with their metaphor or meaning (Peirce 1994, s.v. 2.222). There are three main roles for the symbol to perform: (1) direct reference of a symbol to its objects – denotation; (2) reference of the symbol to its ground through its object – connotation; (3) reference to its interpretants through its object – the information it embodies (Peirce 1994, s.v. 1.559). Furthermore, the symbol is also a law that denotes an individual and signifies their character; it is a law of embodiment used in every symbol interpretation which reflects the inner meaning world of a person and allows it to be transcendent,¹ which means that the symbol itself can even represent non-empirical objects and the explanation may become a sign itself. It interacts with someone and thus creates an equivalent or perhaps even more complex sign in the mind of that individual. The symbol does not represent its object in all aspects, but only regarding a certain specific idea, which Peirce calls ground of the representamen and should be understood in a solely Platonic sense (Peirce 1994, s.v. 2.228).

Thought – as a form of action of the mind – is Peirce's third category, which is essential for the triadic semiotic relationship that allows mediation; it is intention (Peirce 1994, 2.86). Umberto Eco noted that no one can escape the suspicion that if there is a gesture performed by a human being there is (always) an underlying significative

intention (Eco 1976, 18). Thirdness (triad) serves in the dyadic relation as an intervening element between the causal act and the effect that does not contain any generality, thus it is a main principle of existence itself, and therefore, the triadic dimension (category) brings mediations and laws (if there are any) into the dyad which alone 'stands for an act of arbitrary will or blind force' (Peirce 1994, s.v. 1.328).

If signs (symbols) were constructed to be directly dependent on what they denote, each named object would have to have its own name, including all possible conceivable states of that object. Therefore, we could not consider these signs as signs at all, because they would not perform the function of representation. For this reason, it is more economical to use (and create) signs as arbitrary – non motivated (Eco 1976, 190), although they seem counterintuitive that way, since they allow us to operate with the principle of categorization, despite the fact that their creation is always more demanding in terms of memory and learning. Inferences and references to specific theories and concepts are hard to learn (and so are their instrumentations and representations), but the symbolic hardware is more perceptible and persuasive in society (Asprem 2013, 16).

MAGIC AND SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE

The common paradigm states that we must know the meaning of some symbols in order for them to speak to us (Gendlin 1997, 103), i.e. the meaning has to be set by convention. I believe that this is not the case for magic. The symbolic language of magic is not a list of signs, but rather a countless number of mysterious tokens (marks) that are mostly combined together, often ignoring the linearity of (written) language, as the examples of sigils and amulets will show and as will be explained in the final section. Umberto Eco refers to these as secret codes or ciphers (Eco 1976, 8, 11; 237). These secret codes, although usually understood only by the originator, belong to the semiotic system, and may include secret messages, divination, card interpreting (reading), among others.

Codes work on the principle of plurality. It is possible to combine them into complex superimposed symbols which are layered vertically, referring back to the first basic one (Eco 1976, 58). The code incorporates multilevel parts, with the prior enhancing the expression of the subsequent and the subsequent becoming the content of the prior. A sign function emerges when an expression is in correlation with a content, whereas all parts are the functional elements of such a correlative relationship (Eco 1976, 48). If the final symbol is composed of many referring codes, it may lead to overcoding. The aim of capturing the fundamental primordial meaning is confusing and often impossible; in that case, the code is called a subcode. The process of unraveling (deciphering) the primary meaning is called decoding. "When deciphering

¹ Charles Sanders Peirce very strongly rejected all possible indications of scholastic interpretation in this direction (CP 2.230).

Symbols in Magic: Tools for Transforming Reality

a secret message one must first be sure that it is indeed a message and therefore that there is an underlying code, to be 'abducted' from it" (Eco 1976, 238). The decoding (deciphering) process is an interpretive process of understanding, as the subject derives the conclusion of the current case based on experience from previous encodings (Eco 1976, 131). It is an equivalent for Charles Sanders Peirce's term abduction; a purely inferential logically constructed method of making a prediction with no certainty of success that leads to the most likely true conclusion via the subject's past experiences, and hoping for expedient and rational induction in the future (Peirce 1994, s.v. 2.270; 2.776; 5.188).

This is essential for the paradigm of magic, as knowledge of magical constitutive elements is the core for understanding the language and makes it understandable for those who surround themselves with magical artefacts; it also makes it incomprehensible for the general public, which leads to superstitious myths, as seen in the word *occult* itself, which means 'secret' or 'hidden'. More on this topic will be elaborated in the final section.

In terms of spoken language, magic makes extensive use of formulas: "this", "I order", "I bind" thus proposing to the recipient that all actions have a reason, an intention, an automatic cause of the desired effect (Gordon and Simón 2010, 360) – that is, there is a kind of rational causality, without the recipient explicitly understanding the symbols. This type of uttering is part of performing the action itself, especially in ritual context, where articulating and repeating explicit performatives is part of the process of making a change in the outer world (Gordon and Simón 2010, 358). The mage performs the illocutionary act, therefore the change, via enunciating the performative formula.² Additionally, people tend to believe in the creative force of words themselves, as simply the mere action of naming things gives a sort of 'empirical grip on the entities' (Tambiah 1968, 13). This ethos is rooted in so-called sympathetic magic, where like produces like based on imitation or correspondence, thus repeated words with an empirical referent may affect the reality, as it will be shown in the example of amulets.

MAGICAL CREATION OF NEW CODES AND SYMBOLS

The main idea of magical practice is that the world around us is fully symbolic and, by changing our codes regarding reality, changes can be achieved in reality itself; that is, magic can transform reality (Dunn 2008, 8).

If reality at an even more fundamental level than the quantum level – is symbolic in nature, then manipulating symbol systems manipulates the semiotic web and therefore manipulates reality. (Dunn 2005, 36)

² Note that most magical formulas are in Latin language, and formulas expressing commands never occur in relation to the gods; most performative verbs in Latin formulas are followed by the dative case, revealing that formulas are widely used to establish an interaction with the supernatural. For more on this topic, see Gordon and Simón, 2010, 360–373.

SIGIL MAGIC

How it is possible in magic to change reality by changing codes can be best demonstrated on the example of sigils. Sigil magic, even though it already appears in Kabbala and much earlier, was first introduced more comprehensively by the occultist Austin Osman Spare. This technique is based on the relationship between the conscious and the subconscious, and its exact procedure was described by the magician Frater U:D: (see Frater U. D. 2012).

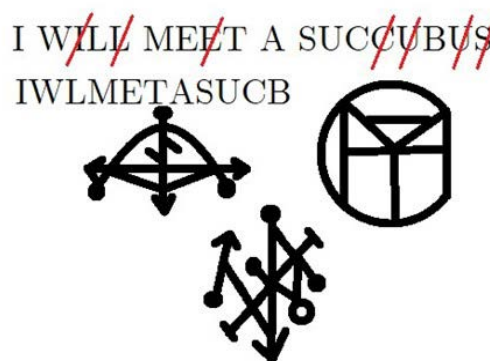


Figure 1 Examples of final sigils

Sigils may help the mage to obtain something they cannot get through normal channels. The mere desire, or simply the act of wanting, is usually not effective in the empirical world. The will gets into dialogue with the mind, and this disrupts the magical ability in many ways, such as the fact that the desire itself becomes part of the egocomplex due to the mind's anxiety of failure. Afterwards, the original desire shifts into a complex of conflicting ideas. The key paradigm for sigils is that they work because they stimulate the mind and will to work subconsciously, bypassing the mind, like a wish, which is fulfilled once it has been forgotten (Carroll 1987, 20).

A *sigillum* is a monogram that represents the magician's desire/intention, originally formulated in a sentence that is transformed by a combination of its letters into a symbol that signifies the desire (Dunn 2008, 9). The sigil constitution gives a huge amount of creative freedom as the letters contained in the final symbol can be rotated, flipped horizontally, and or turned upside down; also, the letters may overlay or cover each other and share the common lines (Theodore 2018, 8), as shown in Figure 1. Mages frequently end protruding lines with neutral shapes that do not disturb the sigil itself or to close the entire symbol to any geometrical shape, as a form of custom, although not mandatory. This is done with the purpose that the sigil cannot be disturbed externally by a foreign hand in conjunction with that it is separated from the surrounding space, as an attempt at magical discontinuity. Once a symbol is created, the magician must activate it. Activation is

most often achieved through orgasm, intentional physical pain, or a state of deep meditation (Dunn 2005, 100). Subsequently, the magician forgets the whole operation, and the *sigillum* is supposed to become active. The free creativity in the sigil creation makes the sigil even more potent as the mage may forget the specific shape of the end symbol easily, thus allowing the process of activation followed by the subconscious sink more efficient (Theodore 2018, 7; 11).

From the point of view of semiotics, the activation of the sigil is a restructuring of codes that we interpret as reality. By creating a symbol (sigil) itself, there is no immediate achievement of transcoding, because contemplation over such an uncharged sigil reinforces in the subconscious the already preexisting codes that prevent individual magical manifestation. For the magician to be able to restructure the old codes into their own, they must first destroy the old ones. The way they accomplish this is by completely turning off the perception of reality (the network of preexisting codes) and their own conscious mind as such. "To successfully lose the sigil, both the sigil form and the associated desire must be banished from normal waking consciousness" (Carroll 1987, 22). This can be best achieved by a state of physical pain, trance, or orgasm. If the first thing the magician sees after these states is their own created *sigillum*, the code will be rewritten; the new code will contain the intention of the created sigil; both the operation and the preexisting codes will be forgotten, and that will be followed by a shift from consciousness to subconsciousness (Dunn 2008, 9). From now on, the *sigillum* becomes part of the world and is active; both for the magician and even for those who do not know its meaning.

The idea contained in the sigil subsumes more information than a sentence itself could represent; it encompasses so much information that no one but the mage who created it can decipher it. In addition, a good magician should forget the specific purpose for which the *sigillum* was created. It seems paradoxical, but in reality, it is necessary to distinguish information and meaning, since they are two different things. For example, the hitherto undeciphered Rongorongo glyph system has not yet been decoded, but this does not mean that tablets written in this language do not carry any information (Dunn 2008, 73). A system of signification, including sigils, incorporates present units as well as absent ones; the code enacts an analogy between what it stands for and its correlate, valid for every conceivable addressee, regardless of whether the addressee exists (Eco 1976, 8).

TAROT

The well-known Tarot cards work on a similar basis. A deck of tarot cards consists of 78 cards, each containing a major symbol and other accompanying attributes that may vary depending on the specific artistic representation. The symbols themselves are understood to be

archetypal and allow communication between unconsciousness and consciousness; they have an integrative function and act representatively within a specific situation. "The therapeutic function of Tarot readings consists in the transformation of habits and discovering meanings in experience" (Semetsky 2009, 47). The supporting (additional) attributes of the cards open the field of semantic polysemy, which varies depending on the specific cultural code and diverse contextual interpretation (Semetsky 2014, 173).

Another significant factor of efficient reading is the process of shuffling the cards. The procedure of shuffling the Tarot deck plays a crucial role, as randomization allows the initial separation between the [Object] and [Interpretant]³ and provides new connections and associations through retroactivity (Bennett 2021, 119).

Each position in the sequence of pictures constituting a particular layout has some specific connotations. Tarot pictorial symbolism embodies intellectual, moral and spiritual lessons derived from collective human experiences across times, places and cultures. (Semetsky 2012, 28)

In general, "Shuffling a deck of cards induces a permutation on it which is not predictable" (Pemantle 1989, 38). The most common shuffling method is the riffle shuffle; for a 52-card deck to be sufficiently randomized, about 7 riffle shuffles are needed (Aldous and Diaconis 1986, 345). The second method of shuffling is the overhand shuffle; according to an experiment conducted by the Department of Statistics at the University of Berkley, for a 52-card deck, at least 1000 shuffles are needed for the deck to be sufficiently randomized (Pemantle 1989, 49). Following Aldous and Diaconis (Aldous and Diaconis 1986, 333), "successive shuffles can be treated as independent, so repeating a shuffle corresponds to convolving the measure with itself." It is important to note that since each shuffle induces a permutation which is not predictable, it is essential to bear in mind that numbers of minimal shuffles are approximate guesses (although based on calculations) strongly influenced by the shuffling skills of the person who works with the cards. Also, with additional elongated shuffling, the deck is not randomized to a greater extent. There is always a threshold; when reached, the rising sequences reach the asymptotic result. In the case of the riffle shuffle the threshold is reached with about 13 shuffles (Silverman 2019, 57), in overhand shuffle around 3000 (Pemantle 1989, 49). If one will shuffle less than the minimum recommended or more than the threshold, it is more than probable that card ranks, symbols, and pairs will occur repeatedly.

Since the deck of Tarot cards consists of 78 cards, the number of shuffles must be modified accordingly. The minimum number of shuffles to pledge the randomization is in direct proportion (increasing tendency) to the deck size. The larger the deck, the more shuffling is required to guarantee randomization. Following the

³ Note that in the original text, Bennett used terms sign and referent, instead of object and interpretant.

formula used in the previous experiment ($\sim 3/2 \log_2 n$), in the case of the riffle shuffle at least 9 to 10 shuffles are needed. In the case of the overhand shuffle, the minimum number of shuffles would be more than 1000. The number of minimal shuffles should be noted and remembered, as unfamiliarity with it can be mistreated as synchronicity. Intentionally or unintentionally, a person who reads the Tarot may see repeated cards from previous readings or previous clients and may misinterpret it as a 'sign', when in fact, it could be ignorance, bad shuffling skill, or a trick.

Nevertheless, to master the best results in a divination branch as a (card) reader, according to the book of *Liber Null*, the best method suggested is reaching the state "just below the threshold of deliberateness, but above the threshold of pure randomness" (Carroll 1987, 53). The mage should let the magic slip from their conscious control, but they should not allow the process to become purely random. The difficulty of the reading does not lay in reading the symbols, but in creating the magical link, which is based on the mage's own intuition (Carroll 1987, 53). Tarot is based on the assignment of the symbolic meanings of cards, which are interpreted according to the intentions of the reading subject and further modified considering the context of the individual reading (Semetsky 1998, 1999, 38). As it is written in *Liber Null*, the magician should master at least one of the systems of divination in order to silence the mind and let the inspiration flow and provide answers. No matter if the chosen system is cards, crystal gazing, pendulum, runestick or diving rod, the system of used instruments is symbolic and it serves only as an amplifier for inner abilities (Carroll 1987, 19). Symbols serve as vehicles that carry the answer into the conscious mind. "Then a further effort must be made in the interpretation to get that magical perception to come into complete manifestation" (Carroll 1987, 53).

This application of the notion of symbol opens a possible connection between Pierce's semiotics and Carl Jung's analytical archetypal psychology, with respect to the context and emotions of the subject who interprets them (Semetsky 2009, 47), thus reinforcing the actual process of individuality in objective reality. The main symbols on a Tarot card reveal existential/experiential aspects, therefore their role is archetypal, whilst the countless number of accompanying attributes (icons and indices) brings up a myriad of context free associations regardless of the fact that the very order of the cards makes each reading an universal story that cannot be completely exhausted or repeated, because it is so saturated with symbols that only those that 'speak' to the reader through current situational emotions reach the consciousness and subconsciousness. Simultaneously, Tarot serves as a therapeutic agent, while the countless number of different combinations, sequences, and orders of the cards make each reading a unique phenomenon

that allows completely unique and new associations to arise during each reading, allowing the subject to work with their emotions, perception, habits, intuition, and inner self efficiently.

In recent years, the trend of so-called general readings has grown in popularity on multimedia platforms and social networks. These pre-recorded videos are recommended based on platform algorithms, reinforcing the sense of synchronicity and intent to their viewer. In the majority of cases, the viewer is supposed to choose intuitively from one of the preprepared piles in the video and watch its reading afterward. By virtue of the platform's deliberate recommendations and the illusion of control⁴ – in this case the intuitive choice of a deck – an impression in the viewer that the pre-recorded video speaks solely to them is evoked. As a result of this trend, Tarot seems to have already been fully adapted to the 21st century media environment, a fact which attests to its timeless and fully anonymous phenomenal status, for which the only requirement of functionality is to be seen (read).

AMULETS

Of all the examples mentioned in this paper, amulets are undoubtedly the most unique. Amulets are magical artefacts worn or attached to the body, as they should work within a short radius of action (Carroll 1987, 61). The etymology is derived from the Latin *amuletum*, which comes from the Arabic *hamalet*. "The origins date millennia back to Egyptian, Roman, Greek, and Jewish cultures" (Crow 2009, 99), although these devices are found in most cultures, from those in America to those in the Mediterranean to those in Asia.

The objective of amulets is so diverse that they can be classified as multifunctional. The most frequent use is protective (apotropaic) and healing (therapeutic) functions, but amulets can be used to attract love, gain popularity and favor, improve memory and good luck, obtain money, curse the enemy, win the battle, or get in touch with one's spirit guide among many others (Hanegraaff 2006, 61). There is still on-going discussion about gender, whether amulets were more popular among men or women in ancient times. Assumably, men wore amulets most often in risk situations such as battles or fighting an acute illness; however, presumably not as often as women and children, who used them in more mundane contexts and daily activities (Sanzo, Mastrocinque, and Scapini 2020, 188).

The form of amulets is not mandatory either – the charm may consist of magic names, sigils made through planetary squares, numbers, vowels, angel names, combined alchemical symbols, psalms, texts, icons, conjunctions of planets, simple signs, or just the shape itself may be significant (Frankfurter 2019, 508). The material is also diverse. A wide range of options is provided according to one's preferences or the availability and accessibility of stone, metals, papyrus, wood, paper, leather, gemstones,

⁴ The illusion of control is the tendency for people to overestimate their ability to control events. It was named by U.S. psychologist Ellen Langer and is thought to influence gambling behavior and belief in the paranormal.

cloths, organic materials, or skin (tattoos) (Hanegraaff 2006, 60–71). The form of the symbol on the amulet is chosen based on the desired aim, and is thus intentional and not random. The material represents a more exact magical plane, whereas it is based on general principles of sympathetic magic, therefore its choice is usually not arbitrary either:

If we analyse the principles of thought on which magic is based, they will probably be found to resolve themselves into two: first, that like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause; and, second, that things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed. The former principle may be called the Law of Similarity, the latter the Law of Contact or Contagion. From the first of these principles, namely the Law of Similarity, the magician infers that he can produce any effect he desires merely by imitating it: from the second he infers that whatever he does to a material object will affect equally the person with whom the object was once in contact, whether it formed part of his body or not. (Frazer 1983, 14)

Consequently, the material and the symbol for the amulet is usually chosen in coherence with its purpose, where the material of the amulet is its *index*, the inscription on the amulet is its *icon*, and the amulet as a whole creates a layered *symbol*; as described in Frazer's text, it reflects the law of similarity, where like produces like based on the law of imitation or correspondence. It is believed that each entity rules over a wide range (variety) of *materia* – that it has power over certain days, materials, planets, incenses, etc. Therefore, it is not surprising that a long exorcistic spell was found inscribed on the carnelian gemstone (Hanegraaff 2006, 67), or that for an invisibility spell, an eye of a corpse was needed (Hanegraaff 2006, 69).

To give a better understanding, it is also believed that each planet rules over certain metals, colors, herbs, flowers, animals, incenses, and stones. “The planetary stones are used, with the appropriate planetary metal, for special purposes, mostly to acquire the particular benefits conferred by each planet” (González-Wippler 2009, 64). Each planet is distinguished by a special symbol, as shown in Figure 2 (González-Wippler 2009, 57). Although planetary symbols are not as popular as the signs of the zodiac for amuletic use nowadays, they are considered more important in the preparation of amulets and in the performance of all kinds of magic, as they are perceived to be the main constitutional signs – basic elements (Lehrich 2003, 79). Not only astrological symbols, but also for magical purposes and especially for the preparation of amulets, seals are often used, as shown in Figures 3 and 4. “In addition to the symbols and the seals of the angels, the planets were also ascribed a spirit and an intelligence, or demon. Both these

two entities were also identified by means of the proper seals” (González-Wippler 2009, 60). These convoluted symbols are composed via unified logical processes, such as constructing through planetary squares. It is a coding process where words are transferred into Hebrew, where each letter has its own numerical value. The numbers corresponding to the letters in the pre-selected square, which is always chosen according to the intention, as each planet has its own set of squares, are then connected by a single line, which creates the resulting symbol (spirit, intelligence, etc.).

Sun	☉	Jupiter	♃
Moon	☾	Saturn	♄
Venus	♀	Uranus	♅
Mars	♂	Neptune	♆
Mercury	☿	Pluto	♇

Figure 2 The signs of the planets

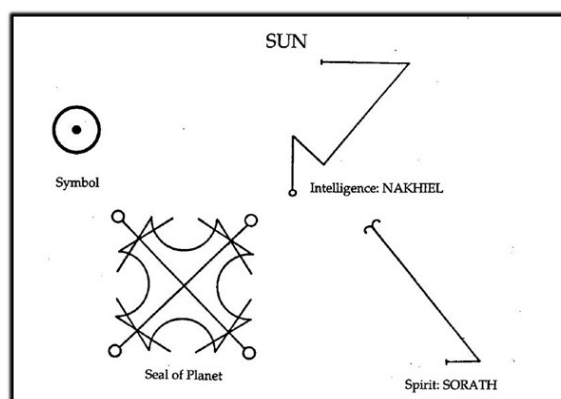


Figure 3 Symbol and seals of the sun

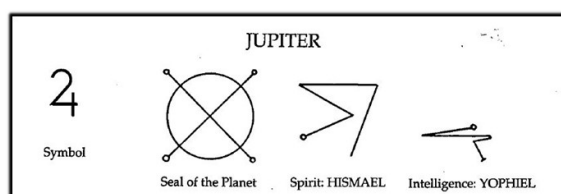


Figure 4 Symbol and seals of Jupiter

For instance, if somebody wishes to obtain money (via personal amulet creation), one of the easiest magical ways should be the following: one gets a material which is connected to sun⁵ (amber, gold, topaz...), chooses a day which is devoted to sun (Sunday), on that day, one carves, engraves, paints, burns the symbol(s)/seals related to money/richness (alchemical sign of the gold, symbol of Jupiter...) – or they can combine them together to create a superimposed symbol. However, this requires at least some basic knowledge of magical essentials and combinatorics, therefore the technique of creation is considered to be for advanced mages, as

⁵ Note that the alchemical symbol of gold is the same symbol as the symbol of the sun, as it is believed that the sun rules over the materia of gold.

Symbols in Magic: Tools for Transforming Reality

discussed in the next section about the combinatoriality of language.

The resulting custom-made amulet, made from a combination of several symbols, bears multiple types of references on several spheres. This technique allows for a more specific, yet wider symbolic connotation. The paradigm is that mages consciously mix together all forms of signification (referring to C. S. Peirce's *icon*,

embodied outcome, which allows turning chaos into order and vice versa, proved to be more complex, as Ferdinand de Saussure and later following studies on sign languages showed.

The linearity of language according to Ferdinand de Saussure lies solely in human physiology (the auditory channel) and not in the symbolic system itself. His principle of linearity states that:

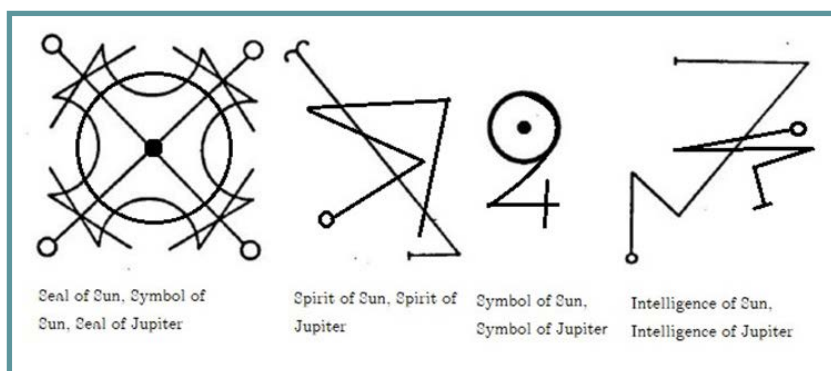


Figure 5 Variations of possible end results of the custom-made amulet from the example mentioned above

index, symbol) for magical purposes, since this combinatorics has grounded implications in magical theory. The theory presumes that: "more references produce a more powerful connection between sign and referent" (Lehrich 2003, 134).

From a semiotic point of view, the most intriguing fact is that the mage can create an amulet to give it to someone else (Dunn 2005, 55), which means that the person who receives the amulet may not even know the true meaning contained in it, they only receive the information about the function it should achieve followed by specific instructions from the mage or vendor on how to 'keep' the amulet or how to 'wear it'. Today we already know that some ancient magis intentionally distorted the amulets and used pseudo-writing and caractères excessively to convey their authority and sacred knowledge of divine names and entities (Sanzo, Mastrocinque, and Scapini 2020, 174). Therefore, the only requirement for the functionality of amulets is for them to be nearby any person, as their essence lays in proximity (short radius) with the subject, which is, indeed, an exceptional semiotic phenomenon.

LINEARITY, SIMULTANEITY AND COMBINATORIALITY OF LANGUAGE

Since the 18th century, there has been a debate that focused on the linearity and simultaneity of language. It was believed that there is a correspondence between the order of words in speech and the 'natural' order of thinking. Language was perceived as a linear sequential order of words into which all simultaneous, pictorial experiences and perceptions were transformed in a form processable by others (Vermeerbergen, Leeson, and Crasborn 2007, 337). The simultaneous-linear distinction in terms of semantics-syntax, as a natural

the signifier, being auditory, is unfolded solely in time from which it gets the following characteristics: (a) it represents a span, and (b) the span is measurable in a single dimension; it is a line. (de Saussure 1961, 70)

This linearity enables the division of units (words) in a stream of speech, and this division is the basis for the creation of linguistic symbols (Vermeerbergen, Leeson, and Crasborn 2007, 339). When Saussure mentioned linearity, he meant only spoken language, which requires an interactive process between speaker and listener – time (Auer 2009, 1); in case of visual symbols, simultaneous grouping in several dimensions is possible (de Saussure 1961, 70).

Ferdinand de Saussure also broadened the issue of linearity in language by adding arbitrariness and iconicity. As he noted, signed languages use symbols which represent some visual property associated with a referent, thus signed languages exploit the possibilities of iconicity and apparently make much greater use of symbols whose relationship with their referents is not arbitrary (Vermeerbergen, Leeson, and Crasborn 2007, 338). As I have demonstrated in the examples of amulets and sigils, there might be strong reasons to assume that the language of magic has more in common with signed language than with spoken language.

At the semantic level, representations do not have linear elements; instead, they are holistic. They use syntax as a form of conversion from simultaneous to linear representations, demanded by the output system; therefore, linguistic symbols can be viewed as sequences and combinations of elements (Vermeerbergen, Leeson, and Crasborn 2007, 340).

This combinatoriality makes language open-ended and allows (us) to make new words, concepts, sounds,

or signs (Zuidema, de Boer 2018, 138). "Productive combinatoriality is difficult to evolve, because it requires multiple components to be put in place simultaneously for it to function" (Zuidema, de Boer 2018, 139). For the effectivity of the new combinatorial system, the following steps are needed: (1) basic elements shared by sender and receiver, (2) a mechanism of combining into larger combinations (synthesis) in the sender, (3) a mechanism in the receiver which allows them to break down the combination into the component parts (Zuidema, de Boer 2018, 139). All three of these requirements are met in the paradigm of magic where the first lays in its theory, the second is contained in the individual magical methods demonstrated above, and the last one is the know-how of the mages, which Umberto Eco called the process of decoding (Eco 1976, 131; 238).

The wide variety of possible combinations of elements, materials, entities, alchemical symbols, seals, and many others allows the sigil (pictorial), charm, amulet, or any other magical symbol to be a fully individualized and perfect fit – resembling the anticipated effect. Thus, when a mage creates a sigil or amulet to achieve their desire, it is easier to choose from the repertoire of already existing symbols and combine them together, as shown in the amulet creation example, rather than experiment with their own imagination like they would have to in the case of word-method sigil creation. Hence in this method, words are transferred into letters, which are combined into a visual symbol, which can be seen but not read on the grounds that *seeing* always has higher informative value than *saying* in the sense of the breadth of possible connotations.

Ordinary language does allow the creation of new symbols from already existing ones (combinatoriality); it is nevertheless limited compared to magical language, which can still be functional and logical on multiple stratified layers (superimposed symbol). Both share a repertoire of basic constitutive elements; however, ordinary language usually creates new words by placing letters and signs one after another, which is a drawback in comparison with magical language, where the options are wider due to layering and superimposing, which allows wider combinatoriality. On the other hand, this 'advantage' of magical language leads to its disadvantage, which lies in its frequent incomprehensibility to the general public: to fully understand the original meaning of a magical symbol requires a complicated decoding process, and sometimes it is not even possible, as only the creator (mage) knows the true meaning, which may lead to the already mentioned obscure superstitions regarding the magical domain.

CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning of this paper, it was mentioned that one needs to know the meaning of some symbols in order for them to speak to us and that we are able to talk about them because we are familiar with the concepts which created them. Subsequently, using the example of sigils, Tarot, and amulets, it was demonstrated that this

paradigm is not absolutely necessary in the language of magic, and that is because the true meaning of a symbol is often known only to its author, but anyone can still work effectively with the symbol itself. This implies a definite symbolic separation between the constituents of the symbol and its effect with the receiver. Additionally, the characteristic feature of magic is its indifference – or rather, the form of its apathy towards the linearity of written language; instead of combining tokens into a coherent unit, magic tends to compress tokens and create brand new (or combined) units containing all their parts in one superimposed symbol to gain a broader scope of the connotative framework.

The example of sigils demonstrated how transcoding, restructuring, and creating new codes work. The magician can compress their intention and desire into a superimposed layered symbol whose meaning is subconsciously known only to them, completely ignoring the potential addressee, yet the sigil is expected to work and manifest their desire simply by existing and belonging to the semiotic web. Tarot explained how important the roles of interpretation, emotions, contextual situation, randomization, and circumstances are, and how easily our perception can be biased; however, it also demonstrated that its essence does not prevail in math and logics, but rather in its therapeutic capacity that is endless due to symbol saturation and the never-ending possibilities resulting from the constantly changing symbol combinations, contexts, and situations. As a result, Tarot is not dependent on special readers, intuitive individuals, skilled mages, or the right timing: Tarot's main condition for functionality is to be seen (read). The last example of amulets revealed that forms of magical symbols and even materials that they are placed upon are not random, but rather intentional. They are chosen based on the law of imitation and correspondence, where like produces like, which is the main paradigm of sympathetic magic. The example of crafting amulets demonstrated the complex combinatoriality composed of a wide range of constitutional elements and magical essentials, which grants the symbol superimposition, but which, however, demands a complicated decoding process to fully understand the undivided meaning. The most significant matter is the short distance (radius) within the amulet and the subject that is the only requirement for any amulet to be functional.

The final section targeted the concept of linearity as a sequential order of words into which all simultaneous pictorial experiences and perceptions are transformed in a form processable to others. It lies in human physiology, since in spoken language it requires time to divide words in a stream of speech, but as signed languages demonstrated, the simultaneous grouping of visual symbols in several dimensions is possible, which resembles the magical plane. In terms of constructing new units, ordinary language and magical language differ on one main point: ordinary language places units one after another, resembling spoken language, which makes the system less variable and open ended, whereas magical

language places one unit on top of another in layers, in order to make the most superimposed symbol possible, which means wider combinatoriality, but also incomprehensibility to the general public and restriction to a closed sect mode.

It is crucial to mention that the paper focused mainly on the materiality of a magic, but magic is first and foremost about beliefs; amulets, sigils, Tarot cards and others are just forms of material vessels, visualizations, helpers, which provide manifestation like Peirce's third term in relation to the dyad. Unlike ordinary communication, in which we have to agree on the meaning in order to share information, in magical practice, information itself is sufficient to form an individual meaning. The magician may restructure the semiotic web, and thus transcode their reality; through magical practice, the magician creates their own world in which they live and to which they attribute meaning that they understand. As a result, magical practice may appear to completely transform the reality around them, or transform the reality in them.

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