

Magical Technology

The magical technology that I created draws strongly on the connection between the subject of the technology and the subject's ancestors. The subject interacts with a three by three tic-tac-toe board where each tile represents a different ancestor class. For example, the upper-left tile is the warrior tile and is characterized by your warrior-like ancestors. The different types of ancestors described on the board are Warriors, Priests, Laborers, Mothers, Strangers, Children, Smiths, Artists, and Explorers. Each group of ancestors offers their advice to the subject's inquiry.

The subject must ask a yes or no question and then call on a blood relative to flip a coin to use the divination technology. The subject picks a random ancestor tile for each iteration and asks their relative to flip a coin. If the coin lands as heads, the subject places an "X" tile on the tile they initially chose. If the coin lands as tails, then the subject places an "O" tile. There are three ways to end the game, just like there are three ways to complete tic-tac-toe. If there is either a three in a row of "Xs" or "Os," the subject stops flipping coins. A three in a row of "Xs" represents a "yes" to the subject's question, while a three in a row of "Os" represents a "no."

Consequently, the subject can then look under the tiles with the three in a row to see which ancestors chose to give their advice, which is located on a separate piece of paper. Each ancestor's advice is explicitly written such that there is a different meaning to the blurb conditioned on if the subject got a "yes" or a "no" as an answer. In addition, there is a different

meaning associated with varying pairings of ancestors since the advice of each ancestor builds on the advice of others. It draws on the persuasive poetry provided by the I-Ching and the modularity of different symbols provided by Tarot cards. Not only does each tile have intrinsic meaning itself, but their combinations have meaning together as well. Therefore, my magical technology offers boundless amounts of subject interpretability like that of Peter Bebergal's ghost box. By sitting on a fine line between vagueness and specificity, my magical technology draws on the interpretation of the canvas of their own consciousness rather than just extracting meaning from the randomness of a couple of coin flips¹.

Like regular tic-tac-toe, there is also the possibility that the game ends in a tie. If there is no three in a row, the subject can count the number of "Xs" and "Os" on the board. If there is more of one piece, then that means that the subject's ancestors are leaning toward that piece's associated answer (either a yes or a no) but can not offer substantial advice based on the ambiguity of the subject's situation.

The game-like structure of the technology was constructed on purpose. It is supposed to represent the forces fighting each other for the sake of your well-being behind the scenes of your life. However, this type of symbolism is not restricted to just the structure of the game. All pieces and tiles should have symbolic and ancestral significance as well. For example, the warrior tile should be passed down to the subject from a warrior-like relative to enhance the magical power of the technology. Therefore, there is a symbolic link of the tiles themselves to a person's ancestry. In addition, this provides the game with a traditional ritual of passing down tiles that enhance the believability of the inner workings of the technology. Weighted significance within parts of the technology itself is important because it engrains a quantifiable value to the

¹ Bebergal, Peter. 2018. "Fear and Soldering." In *Strange Frequencies: The Extraordinary Story of the Technological Quest for the Supernatural*. New York: Penguin. Pp. 169-195.

technology, as seen in Miller's article on the evolution of Tarot cards in Japan². Like tarot cards, tiles can come in many artistic varieties and do not conform to a single artistic style. Therefore, my technology offers multiple degrees of personalization which is essential since this personalization represents the uniqueness of any individual's ancestral tree.

In conclusion, my technology offers many modes of persuasion, including an appeal to tradition, symbolism, and eloquent poetry. It leaves room for interpretation since it offers vague advice. But it also provides concrete answers in the form of a yes or a no. Each design choice of the system was meant to enhance the magic of the user experience and come together to conduct serious inquiries about how one should live their life.

² Miller, Judith. 2011. "Tantalizing Tarot and Cute Cartomancy in Japan." *Japanese Studies*3(1): 73-91.

The advice for each tile

Warrior: Clash with all your strength. Some things take a little courage. But beware, the reckless are those that are blind with anger.

Priest: Reflect and be patient with yourself as you come to decisions. We are not as wise as a higher being.

Laborer: Persistence is necessary in times of hardship, but do not be afraid to look at the flowers from time to time.

Mother: Show love as you do for your own child and your needs will be forever met.

Stranger: There is inner peace in being alone, but make sure reach out to those around.

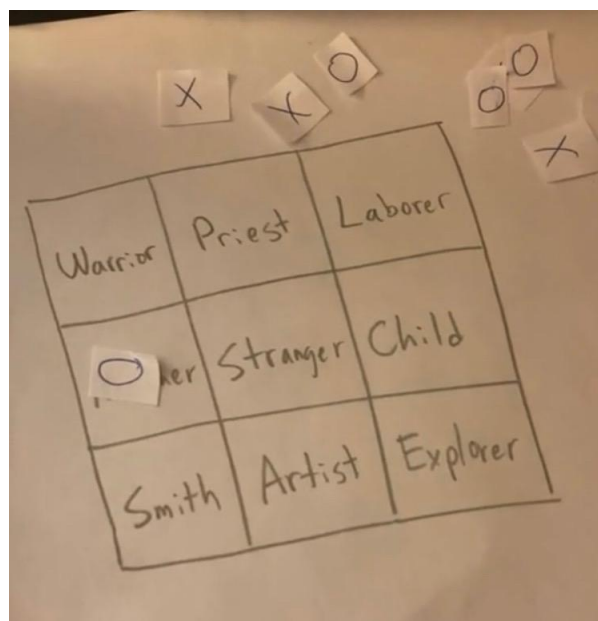
Child: Child-like wonder can inspire those around you. Everyone deserves time to play

Smith: Make something out of nothing. Creation is beautiful yet taxing on your body.

Artist: Play with your emotions like the harp. You'll find there are songs hidden within you.

Explorer: There are many paths to be traveled. The enemy is indecision.

Below is an example image of the board and pieces



MIT OpenCourseWare
<https://ocw.mit.edu/>

21A.520 Magic, Science, and Religion
Fall 2021

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <https://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.