

Algorithmic Divination

Exploring the “Magic” of Algorithmic Predictions with Technology-Mediated Tarot Card Readings

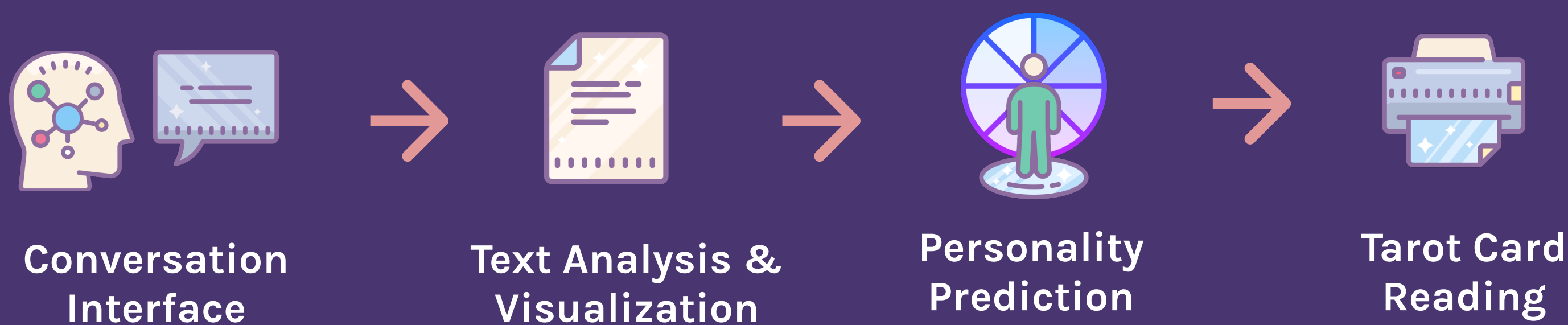
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We draw parallels in the nature of predictions made by algorithms to those of divination, which likewise render the abstract into actionable recommendations. Our objective is thus to evaluate whether reexamining algorithmic predictions with the mystical lens of divination may lead people to reconsider the authority of technical objects. We design a system which enables self-guided tarot card readings, involving a conversational interface, screen-based feedback visualization, natural language processing, and AI-powered predictions of the past, present, and future. In 10 research sessions with our prototype, we found that interactions reflected broader, generalizable insights about interactions with computational prediction systems, including lack of user agency when faced with potential manipulation, privacy concerns, as well as poor performance. Within the traditions of reflective and speculative design, we discuss implications of computing's tendency toward magical presentation and imagine alternate paradigms.

Interaction Flow



To begin, the user enters a structure measuring approximately 3.5 ft wide, 6.5 ft deep and 6 ft tall, encased in black curtains. With the lights turned off within this "black box" structure, the user is prompted to speak to a disembodied voice named Perceptron, who asks a series of increasingly personal questions.

