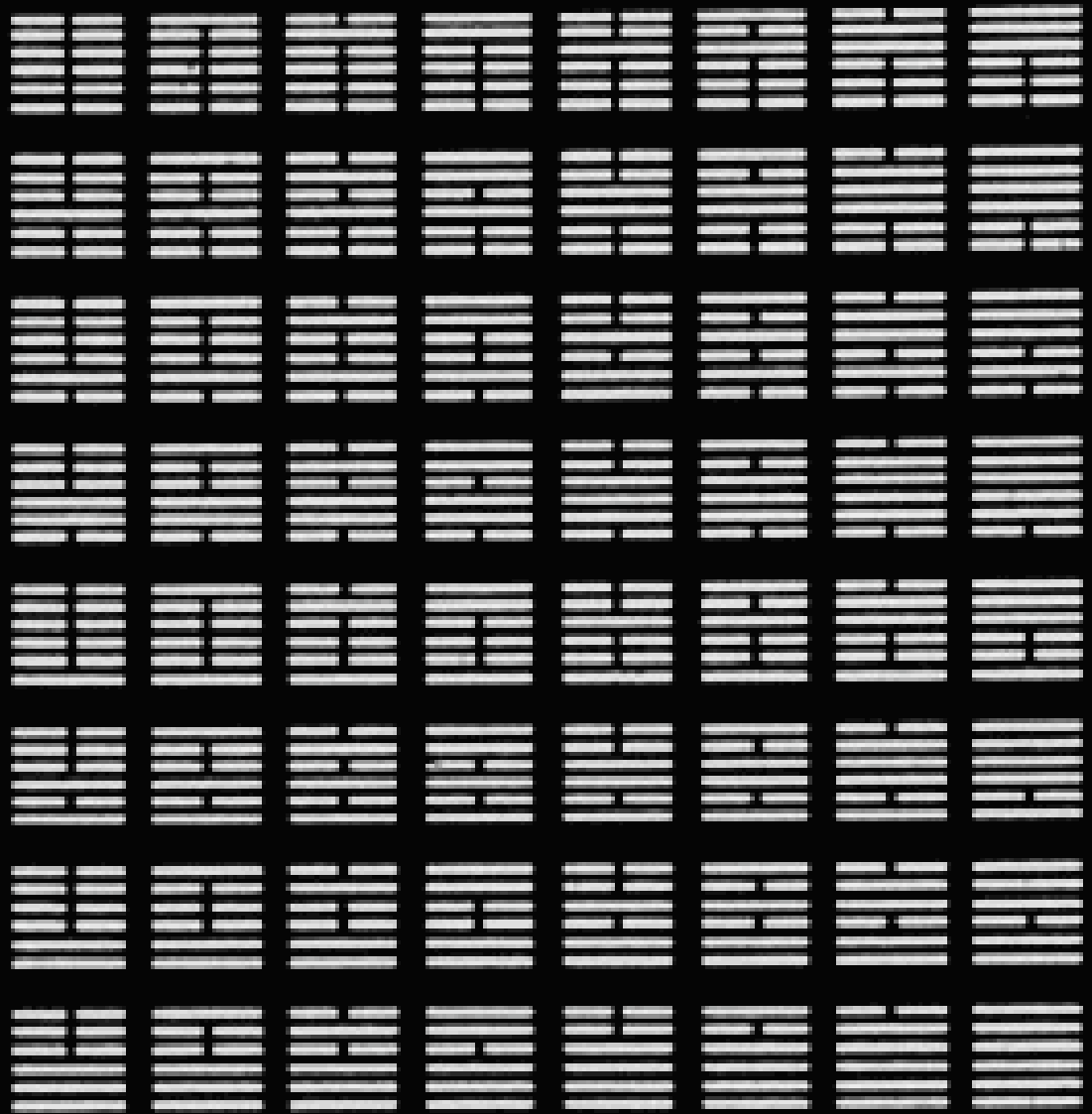


The *I Ching* and the Emergence of Form

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The *I Ching* — Background

- Chinese title / English title — *Yi Jing [I Ching]* = “Book of Changes” or “Classic of Changes”
- Dating and origin highly uncertain

易	經
yi4	jing1
“changes”	“classic”

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The *I Ching* — Structure (1)

- set of 64 abstract line arrangements called hexagrams (卦 *gua4*) with commentaries (sometimes mistakenly referred to as “predictions”).
- hexagram is composed of six horizontal lines
- each line is either *yang* (an unbroken, or solid line), or *yin* (broken)
- each hexagram diagram can be seen as two three-line arrangements called trigrams

The *I Ching* — Structure (2)

- The hexagrams and the trigrams that comprise them can be seen as a mapping of various aspects of nature.

- This simple scheme itself shows the philosophical concept of the interconnectedness of all events, attributes, images (i.e., aspects of the environment), and relationships...

Trigram	Attribute	Image	Material	"Geomantic"	Family Relationship
 1. <i>Ch'ien</i>	the Creative	strong	—	heaven	father
 2. <i>K'un</i>	the Receptive	devoted	earth	—	mother
 3. <i>Chen</i>	the Arising	inciting	wood	thunder	first son
 4. <i>K'an</i>	the Abysmal	danger	water	—	second son
 5. <i>Ken</i>	Keeping Still	resting	—	mountain	third son
 6. <i>Sun</i>	the Gentle	penetrate	—	wind	first daughter
 7. <i>Li</i>	the Clinging	light	fire	—	second daughter
 8. <i>Tui</i>	the joyous	joyful	metal	lake	third daughter

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The *I Ching* — Usage

- Not a book for predicting the future (common misconception)

It can be said that in general only sparse use has been made in the Book of Changes of the explanation of events through divine dispensation. The will of God can be perceived only in very specific, well-defined situations. In the other cases the created world is left to develop on its own. An unalterable event, unaffected and unrestricted by human action is found only in exceptional cases and viewed as God-given fate. What I want to call here tentatively an inherent tendency forms, together with divine dispensation and human action, the great Trinity, which determines events.

— Helmut Wilhelm, *Heaven, Earth, and Man in the Book of Changes*, 54-55

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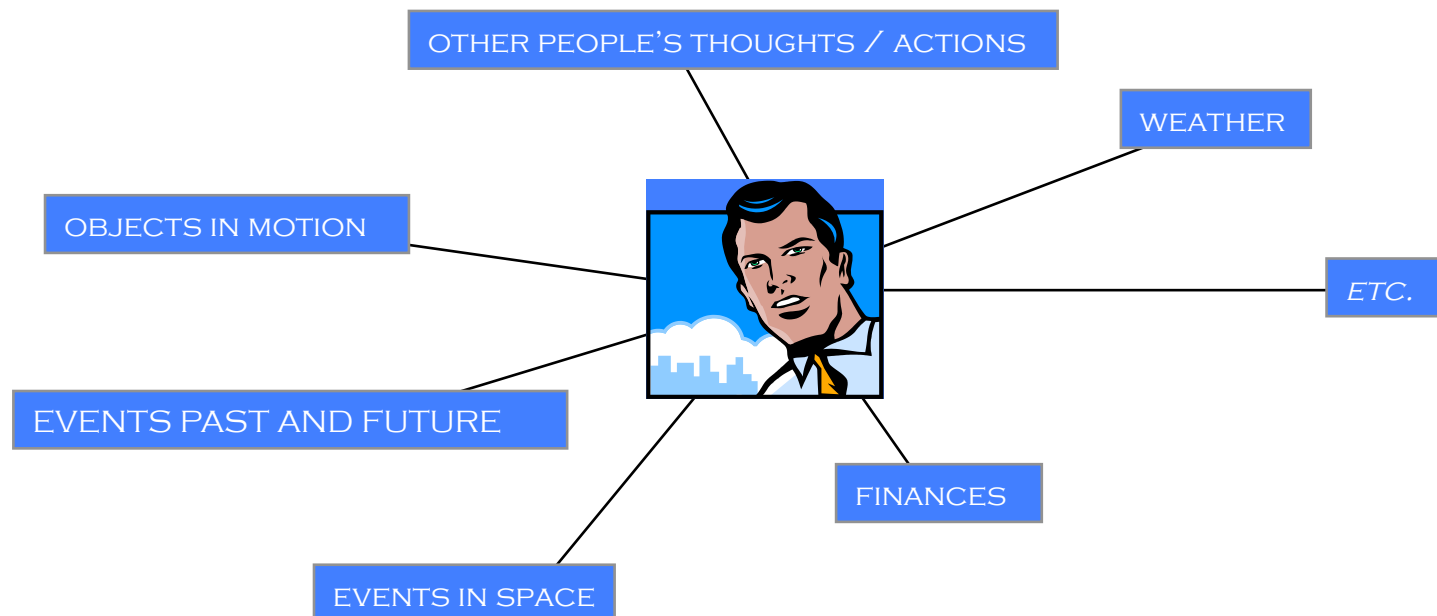
The *I Ching* — Usage

- Used for decision-making and ***understanding circumstances***
- Each hexagram represents a description of a kind of ***state, influences, or set of circumstances***.
- When a hexagram is cast using one of the traditional methods, each of the yin or yang lines ends up indicated to be either “moving” or “fixed”. The moving lines become their opposites, and this aspect adds more fluidity to a given *I Ching* reading.
- We will use a highly simplified method for casting a hexagram, but philosophically, this can be rationalized: an appropriate reading will *always* result.

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The *I Ching* — Key Concepts

- At each moment, a person is in a particular kind of **state**, **influences**, or **set of circumstances**, that is changing, fluid.



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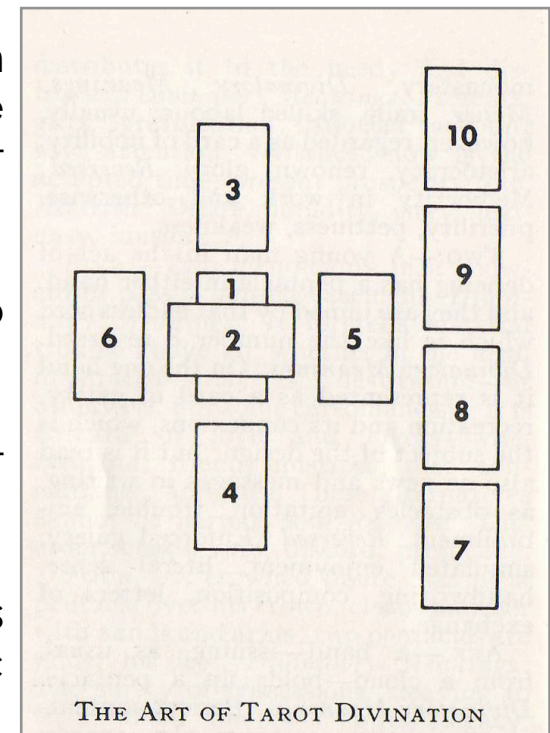
The *I Ching* — Key Concepts

- Again, *not* a book for predicting the future (common misconception), but rather...
- a method for ***understanding circumstances, influences, and forces...***
- that may be ***manifested, manifest, or manifesting*** (my terms)
- Actually very similar to Tarot card reading methodology...

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The *I Ching* — Tarot Card Comparison

1. Querent's general environment, "the influence with which he is actuated all through"
2. Obstacles facing the Querent
3. "Crowning" card, "represents (a) the best he can arrive at, or (b) his ideal in the matter; (c) what he wants to make his own; (d) but it is not his own at present"
4. What belongs to the Querent, "that which he has to work with and can use"
9. The "current from which he is passing away, and it may be the past of the matter"
10. What is ahead for the Querent, the "current that is coming into action and will operate in the specific matter"

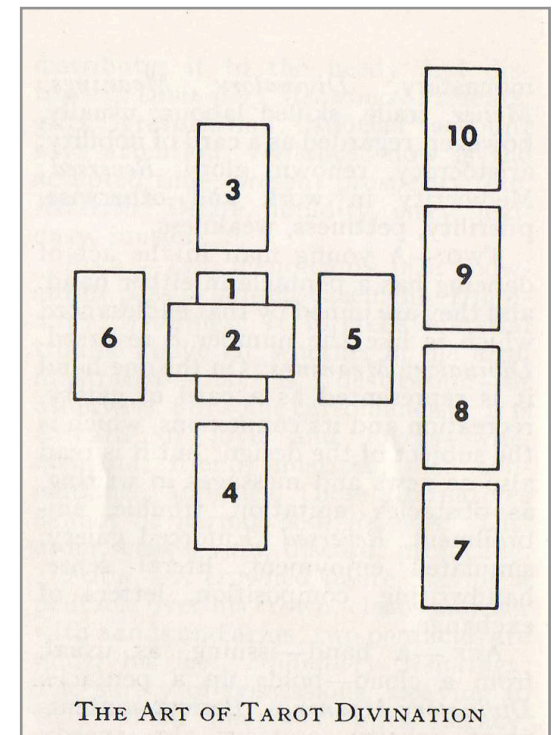


- Adapted from Arthur Edward Waite, *The Key to the Tarot*

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The *I Ching* — Tarot Card Comparison

7. Signifies the Querent, “his attitude and relation to the matter
8. Signifies “his house, his environment in the affair; the influences, people, and events about him”
9. Signifies the Querent’s “hopes and fears”
10. “Represents what will come”



- Adapted from Arthur Edward Waite, *The Key to the Tarot*

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The I Ching — Tarot Card Comparison

The individual cards of the Tarot deck, too, are sometimes similar in terms of symbolism and meaning to the I Ching hexagrams...



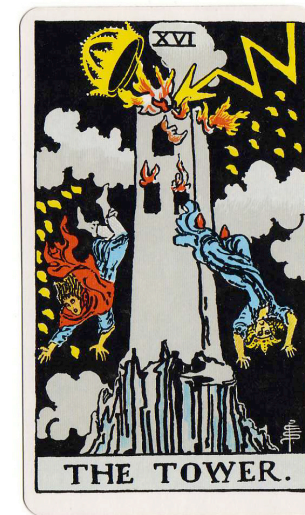
大壯 da4 zhuang4

“great strength”



節 jie2

“moderation”



蹇 jian3

“obstruction”



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The *I Ching* — Space-Time Model Basis: determinism

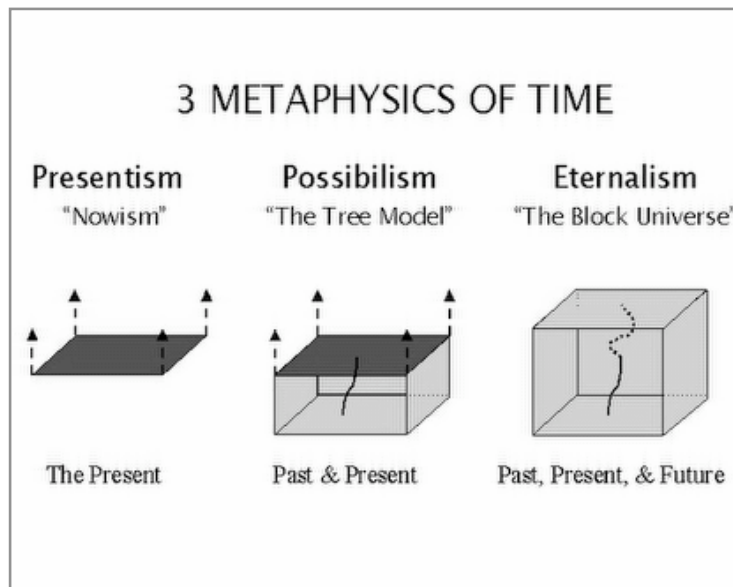
- The *I Ching* (and similar systems, such as Tarot cards) are attempts at creating maps of **circumstances, influences, and forces** for all of existence
- Analogous (but not the same as) determinist model of Newton's physics: if we knew the velocity and position of every particle in the universe, and acting forces, we could predict all events.
- The French mathematician Pierre Simon de Laplace (1749 - 1827) described what we call "determinism" in this way:

If an intelligence, for one given instant, recognizes all the forces which animate Nature, and the respective positions of the things which compose it, and if that intelligence is sufficiently vast to subject these data to analysis, it will comprehend in one formula the movements of the largest bodies of the universe as well as those of the minutest atom: nothing will be uncertain to it, and the future as well as the past will be present to its vision.

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The *I Ching* — Space-Time Model Basis: block time

- The *I Ching* attempts to create a map of ***circumstances, influences, and forces*** for a given moment, when the Querent casts for a hexagram and asks a question.
- That moment can be seen as a point in time, but really it is a ***point in space-time, in a block space-time configuration.***



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The *I Ching* — Configuration of the User/Universe (1)

- All events and situations, and the permutations of those events and situations, exist simultaneously.
- We are each connected, inextricably, to the universe, in all respects; this what is known as “correlative cosmology”.
- We are not typically conscious of this connection, but we can perceive it if we use the appropriate tools and methods.
- If we become conscious of this connection, we can “foresee what will happen”, or, to put it in a way more in line with Chinese thinking, we can perceive the “correct” path of the many that exist simultaneously.

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The *I Ching* — Configuration of the User/Universe (2a)

- Since we are each connected, inextricably, to the universe, in all respects, any activity we engage in — such as casting the *I Ching* — is connected, too.
- This is closely related to the idea of “macrocosm in microcosm”, in that a small event (the casting) can reflect the larger configuration of the universe in a given moment/point in space time.

The *I Ching* and the Emergence of Form

The *I Ching* — Configuration of the User/Universe (2b)

- One of the commentaries on the *I Ching* describes the discovery of the trigrams attributed to a certain Fu Xi, the first (and probably mythical) emperor of the Chinese:

When in early antiquity Pao Hsi [another name for Fu Xi] ruled the world, he looked upward and contemplated the images in the heavens; he looked downward and contemplated the patterns on earth. He contemplated the markings of birds and beasts and the adaptations to the regions. He proceeded directly from himself and indirectly from objects. Thus he invented the eight trigrams in order to enter into connection with the virtues of the light of the gods and to regulate the conditions of all beings.

- Richard Wilhelm, trans., *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, 328-329.

- Note here the idea of “as above, so below”, the “macrocosm in microcosm” concept so very common to many systems of belief, such as the Jewish Cabbalists. Also: we are part of everything, and made of the same “stuff” as the entire cosmos.

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The *I Ching* — Configuration of the User/Universe (3)

- A key element in the *I Ching* is the idea of **change**.
- This is the most subtle aspect of the *I Ching*, difficult to grasp.
- This change “is never the kind of change which can be induced by an external efficient cause”¹.
- Rather, it is the same kind of change that a living being goes through, i.e., growth, reproduction, and development.
- The universe as a whole is undergoing this kind of change, at every moment, with the casting capturing a particular moment’s “configuration”.
- “It should be noted that the Chinese concept of change as exemplified in the *I Ching* is not one of a chaotic flux. The cosmic process follows some patterns immanently or implicitly. All existences in the universe follow a definite order...”²

¹ Joseph S. Wu, “Process, Interaction, and the Human Situation: A Humanistic Approach to the I-Ching”

² Ibid.

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The *I Ching* — Usage in Common Practice (1)

- A user of the *I Ching* comes up with a hexagram through a method involving the toss of yarrow stalks or, sometimes, coins.
- Each of the 64 hexagrams has an explanatory text, which, through interpretation, addresses the question of the user.
- These questions usually take the form of decision-making issues; for example, a modern user of the *I Ching* might ask, “Should I accept this new job offer?” More precisely, the user would ask, “**What are the existing factors (in the great universal now) that I should consider when deciding whether or not to accept this new job offer?**”
- Then the user of the *I Ching* would cast the yarrow stalks or toss coins, and come up with one of the 64 hexagrams.

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The *I Ching* — Usage in Common Practice (2)

- Each hexagram and its explanatory text provides the user an “answer” to the questioner in the sense that the relevant parameters and factors of the question are articulated — although in very obscure language.
- For example, a user might, in answer to the job question above, get the hexagram *Kun* (坤) translated as “The receptive”. The text for this hexagram runs:

THE RECEPTIVE brings about sublime success,
Furthering through the perseverance of a mare.
If the superior man undertakes something and tries to lead,
He goes astray;
But if he follows, he finds guidance.
It is favorable to find friends in the west and south,
To forego friends in the east and north.
Quiet perseverance brings good fortune.

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The *I Ching* — Usage in Common Practice (3)

- Each hexagram and its explanatory text provides the user an “answer” to the questioner in the sense that the relevant parameters and factors of the question are articulated — although in very obscure language.
- How does this serve as an “answer” to the questioner? The fact that this is the hexagram that came up in reply to the question is not a chance event. For it is this hexagram that provides the absolutely appropriate description of the relevant factors in relation to your question, at the precise nexus of space and time in which you did the casting. In other words, there could have been no other hexagram for that moment, and hence there is no chance involved.
- So, why the obscure nature of the text itself? The *I Ching* is an attempt to be comprehensive of all existence. To even attempt that with words means to be vague; to try to apply the severely limited tool of language to something as mysterious and transcendent as the universe and its elements means that we will come up short.

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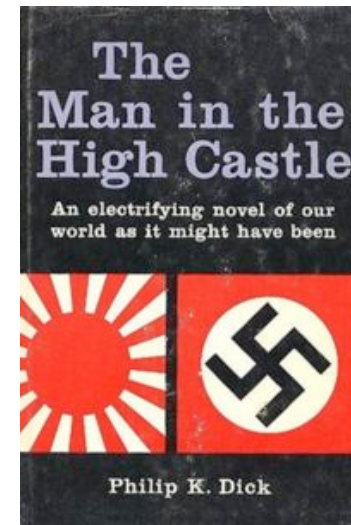
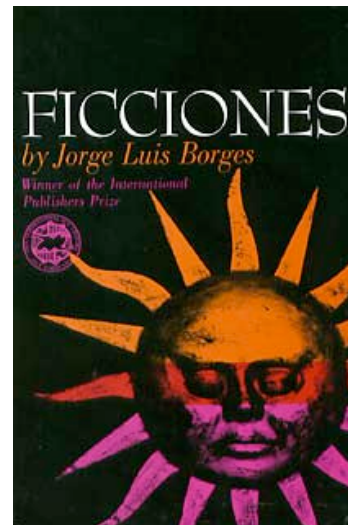
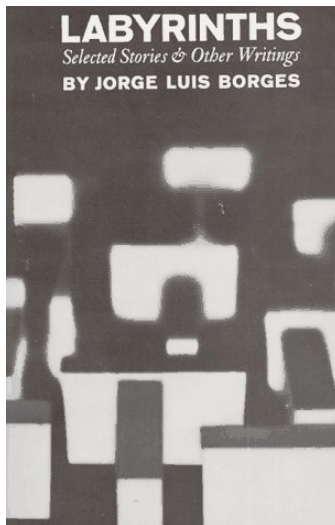
The *I Ching* — Usage in Common Practice (4)

- The human intellect, according to the model implied by the *I Ching*, is also part of this vast space-time, so...
- We have the capacity for a precise interpretation of the text. The meaning is all there in the hexagram, even in its vagueness and obscurity, if we apply our full intellect and interpretive capacity.
- But most importantly:
 1. There is **not** simply an outside observer or questioner inquiring of a book in search of an answer about the future.
 2. Rather, the questioner, the book, the yarrow stalks, the physical setting, and the exact moment in time are **all components in the casting and interpretive process**.
 3. In a sense, the action of divination is **inside space and time**, and is a quest for clarity, not a quest to see something unknown or hidden.

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The *I Ching* in Literature

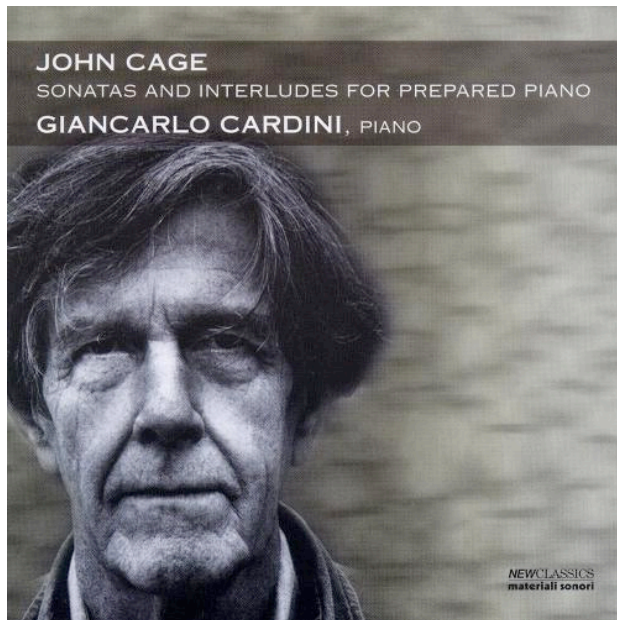
- Jorge Luis Borges, “The Garden of Forking Paths” and less directly, his story “The Library of Babel” (where whole universe is accessible, potentially)
- Philip K. Dick, “Man in the High Castle” (splitting universes, remaking the universe)



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The *I Ching* in Music

- The avant-garde composer John Cage began to use the *I Ching* early on in his career in the assembling of his music; he was interested in the role of change and “indeterminacy” in composition...



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DISCUSSION