

# Things That Talk

*Object Lessons  
from Art and Science*

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Image of Self

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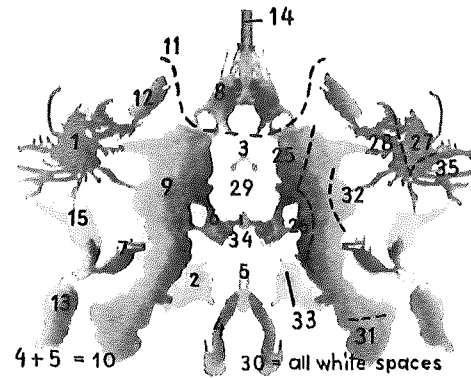


Figure 7.1. Herman Rorschach, *Rorschach-Test* (Bern, Switzerland: Verlag Hans Huber AG, 1921, 1948, 1994).

In a brown cardboard box come ten cards, printed in Bern, Switzerland. Verlag Hans Huber is so concerned about the quality of their reproduction that it will only use the same antique printing presses that stamped out the first edition of the cards in 1921. And it won't print at all if the humidity and temperature do not match the secret instructions that have been passed down over generations. You will be instantly sued for unauthorized duplication of the cards, and psychologists around the world stand vigilant, ready to pounce on wrongful distribution or even casual public display of the images. At the same time this box of plates may well be the most studied object of the last hundred years: several *million* people have not only examined them but recorded the innermost details of what they saw. What are these cards? To answer (or even not to answer) is to present yourself. Just insofar as these cards are described, they describe the describer. Not only do these objects talk back, they immediately double the observer's language with a response that pins the speaker on a psychogrammatic map. These are the cards of the Rorschach test; and they don't mind sending you home, to the clinic, or to prison.

I am concerned here neither with the vast reception history of the method nor with the broader history of psychological testing.

Instead, my aim is to treat these cards as a technology of the self, that is, as highly refined apparatuses for defining, in fine and in large, the nature of "interior life." The goal is to approach the Rorschach test as a material, procedural system — a far less ideal version of Foucault's *souci de soi*.

The argument proceeds in three steps. First, an analysis of the examination logic of nineteenth-century inkblots provides a ground conception of the self against which Rorschach's very different understanding of 1917–1921 is thrown into relief. Late-nineteenth-century inkblot tests served to assess the power of a specific mental faculty, the imagination, in precise analogy with memory or computational tests. Second, we turn to Hermann Rorschach's specific location within the clinical-experimental setting of early-twentieth-century Swiss psychiatry. More specifically, our attention will focus on the material and abstract apparatus that Rorschach built as a "neutral" probe of an inner life that he refused to divide into segregated faculties at all. Instead, Rorschach designed his test to probe *perception* (not, in the first instance, the particular faculty of imagination). Perception mingled affect and cognition in ways that dramatically departed from the older notion of isolated mental functions: depression can matter as much as a capable imagination. Rorschach believed that only a maximally *objective* stimulus, one that appeared utterly removed from human intentionality, could reveal the purely *subjective* nature of the response. That search for an objective measure of an individual's (or group's) characteristic mode of perception drove his insistence on "neutral," "chance," or "unintentional" visual forms: only the purest of "chance" images could surface the inner, structuring forms of perception. Finally, in the third part of the argument, I want to widen the inquiry to address head-on the complex link between subjective and objective conceptions of the self that makes the Rorschach test possible. In the world of

Rorschach's inkblots, subjects make objects, of course: "I see a woman," "I see a wolf's head." But objects also make subjects: "depressive," "schizophrenic." Properly understood, the now-canonical Rorschach test system measures but also reinforces a particular (and specifically modern) integrated, interior self.

### *Inkblot Imagination*

When the French psychometrician Alfred Binet wanted to characterize individual psychology in 1895, he divided his arsenal of tests into (he was French) ten faculties. Each domain merited its own distinct probe:

1. memory
2. nature of mental images
3. imagination
4. attention
5. faculty of comprehension
6. suggestibility
7. aesthetic sentiment
8. moral sentiments
9. muscular force and force of the will
10. dexterity and coup d'oeil

Memory, for example, could be gauged by a subject's ability to reproduce a complex geometric form. Among these various individuated items was number three — the imagination. According to Binet, imagination came in two flavors: involuntary and voluntary. Literary and musical creations were quintessentially voluntary forms of imagination; other, more associative skills were involuntary. However partitioned, imagination had its own test, one that probed it exclusively:

Let there be a spot of ink with a bizarre contour on a white sheet; to some this view will say nothing; to others who have a vivid imagination of the eye (Leonardo da Vinci, for example) the little spot of ink appears full of figures, in which one notes the type and number, without pushing, of course, experience to that kind of hypothesis that the English love to provoke with their crystal vision.<sup>1</sup>

(Leonardo's cameo appearance here is an echo of the often-repeated stories of his use of cracks, ashes, and other "chance" images as an exercise and provocation in visual imagination.)

E.A. Kirkpatrick in the United States had similar goals in his studies of 1900: like Binet, he aimed for a battery of tests, each measuring a specific ability. To test for certain hand-eye and low-level arithmetical skills, young children were asked to count as high as they could in ten seconds, or to sort twenty-five cards into four piles, or to distribute cards according to a letter written on them. Among these timed, order-following quizzes came the inkblot test, which was Kirkpatrick's key to the imagination. To Kirkpatrick's surprise, first-graders handily beat older children. In part, he attributed the six-year-olds' "supremacy" to the directness of their reports. It seemed that older children framed their identifications with a cautionary "it is somewhat like" or "it looks a little like" before identifying the blot with "a dog" or "a cloud." Nothing in this interpretative hesitation by the older schoolchildren particularly intrigued the psychologist except (as Kirkpatrick put it) the signal that cautiousness seemed to heighten with age. Underlying Kirkpatrick's (and Binet's) test procedure was a picture of the self as an aggregate of "powers." Kirkpatrick wrote: "I would suggest that it is desirable to have tests of such a nature that they can be taken by children as well as adults, that they shall be such that all persons tested will have had about equal opportunity for the exercise of the power tested."<sup>2</sup>

In Britain, as in France and the United States, educational psychologists enthusiastically measured the associational capabilities of their charges. At the Women's Education Department of the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire, Cicely J. Parsons sorted schoolchildren's inkblot responses into animals, humans, toys, and other commonplace objects. Miss Parsons, as she signed her articles, was not so riveted by the quantitative production-control ethos that absorbed her stopwatch-wielding American colleagues. Instead, she and others hoped to sort her respondents into bins of reproductive and productive imagination, categories made popular by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.<sup>3</sup> (Taylorist foreman-psychologists to the west of the Atlantic; rewarmed Romantic women's education to the east.)

Details change, but the widespread nineteenth-century use of inkblots in England, the United States, and the Continent all had roughly the same goal: use subject responses to ink blots to classify and grade the imagination. George Dearborn at Harvard shared this ambition:

To "see things" in the ever-changing outlines of summer clouds or among the flames and embers of a fire, has doubtless in all ages been to imaginative men a source of entertainment and delight. . . . For the purposes of studying the reproductive imaginations of men and women, the psychologist might well desire to take the clouds into his control and bid them serve him; but they are far beyond him and will not for a moment stay.

To reproduce, then, under applicable and controllable conditions these familiar studies of human fancy, the following simple means have been adopted, and they constitute the complete apparatus, simple enough, of the investigation. Chance blots of ink, made by pressing gently with the finger a drop of common writing fluid between two squares of paper, furnished all the variety of outline imaginable.

Key to understanding Dearborn's project are his instructions. It is only in the micro-application of these procedures, applied over and over, that one can see just what, statutorily, found its way to the record. In particular, the rules of inkblot engagement *removed* precisely what has become "obvious" through nearly a century of Rorschach procedures. Dearborn's mandate to the subject was to

look at the blot-card always right-side up, turning neither the card, nor the head; to try to employ the whole character if possible, not allowing it to separate into parts while being observed; not to be too particular to get a perfectly fitting object in mind, but to tap at the moment of the consciousness of the first suggested image; to react by a sharp tap as promptly as possible; to report each concrete object suggested as concisely as possible, with any suggested general action of the same, and especially, only such details as occurred before reaction by the tap.<sup>4</sup>

As we will see, *every* element of Dearborn's protocol clashed with the corresponding component of Rorschach's. Whereas Dearborn demanded a rigid orientation of the card, Rorschach specified that subjects could turn the card any way they liked. Whereas Dearborn insisted on the outright deletion of fractional or detailed images, Rorschach taught that the test attributed particular importance to the number and percentage of partial objects seen. Whereas Dearborn asked his emissaries not to be "too particular" about the fit of the inkblot object to the mind's eye of the subject, Rorschach put great weight on the "fit" of the form, as reflected in his scoring nomenclature (F+ = good fit); (F- = poor fit). Finally, whereas Dearborn requested a concise report, Rorschach wanted a great many other aspects of the client's report, including affect, hesitation, and revision.

Perhaps most striking in Rorschach's version of the inkblot

exercise was the division of the test into four highly choreographed phases. The first was "Response." Instructions to the subject were stark, and the directions systematically violated all the strictures imposed by imagination-driven technologies of the self. Sitting next to the subject, the examiner positions himself so that the cards and the subject's gestures toward the cards are clearly visible: "The subject is given one plate after the other and asked, 'What might this be?' He holds the plate in his hand and may turn it about as much as he likes."<sup>5</sup> In Rorschach's test, it is imperative that the patient *not* be given any instructions about what to see or how much (or how little) of the image to report. There was no time limit or race to completion, and the subjects were not to be told *anything* about the number or kind of responses desired. Coercion had to be avoided at all costs — with the caveat that the plates should not be viewed from too great a distance. From afar, plate 1 was often seen as a fox, a relatively rare response in the "normal" (arm's reach) viewing position. It is worth attending to the current doyen of Rorschach, John Exner, instructing on how to handle a subject's questions about the response. Essentially, the examiner (E) should speak without saying anything, presenting the subject (S) with a studied calm that put the card in the light of apparently unmediated presence:

S: Can I turn it?

E: It's up to you.

S: Should I try to use all of it?

E: Whatever you like. Different people see different things.

S: Do you want me to show you where I see it?

E: If you like. (It is probably best at this point to avoid any mention of the Inquiry.)

S: Should I just use my imagination?

E: Yes, just tell me what you see. (It is more appropriate to use the

word see rather than reminds you of to questions of this sort, stressing perception rather than association.)

S: (After giving a response) Is that the kind of thing you want?

E: Yes, just whatever it looks like to you.

S: Is that the right answer?

E: There are all sorts of answers.

S: Does it look like that to you?

E: Oh, I can see a lot of things.<sup>6</sup>

The pursuit of detail takes place in a second, "Inquiry" phase, after the subject has completed the raw identification of the "Response." As in the response phase, while the subject speaks, the examiner helps the cards to respond (by studiously not helping). "Now we are going to go back through [the cards]," the examiner instructs. "It won't take long. I want you to help me see what you saw. I'm going to read what you said, and then I want you to show me where on the blot you saw it." While probing for elaboration of the original response, it is Rorschach axiomatic that no *new* information emerge during the inquiry. If the examiner suspects that the subject is introducing a new interpretation during the inquiry, the examiner should record but not score the comment. Here is an Inquiry exemplar, written in the agreed-on shorthand of the trade:

**Response:**

S: I supp this cb a wm in the cntr

**Inquiry:**

E: And then u said supp this cb a  
wm in the cntr

S: Yeah, c here (outlines), her  
shape. & she's got her hands up  
lik she's waving or sthg

The examiner then sketches the outlines of the waving woman on a workbook template. It is widely recognized among examiners

that distinguishing "new" from "original" material requires skill and training — and the examiner's ability (when appropriate) to disqualify his own questions as leading.

"Scoring" is the third, highly regimented phase of the process. Rorschach divided the scoring process into an evaluation of four axes that crudely might be summarized in four questions: How many responses? Are the answers linked to form or color? Is the figure construed from parts of the images or the whole? What does the subject see? In addressing these questions, the examiner uses a set of codes: Codes of structure include W (whole), D (detail), C (color), M (movement), F (form), and a host of complex combinations and subdivisions. Alongside these are codes of content: A (animal), H (human), and numerous others. So a "butterfly" in plate 1 would be given by WF+A to designate a whole-plate image, of good form, of an animal. "Two angels with streaming robes floating in the air" seen in the same plate would yield DM+H, that is, a detail-based answer, well-specified form, human kinesthesia (motion), with a whole-human form: DMF+H. There are certainly subtleties in ascertaining border cases where motion (kinesthetic response) might or might not be judged present. For example, the simple report "this is an airplane flying" might well be rated without movement, while "a clown precariously balanced on a chair" would count as M. From these raw response encodings, a host of quantitative measures can be computed, numbers of individual responses — for example, percentage of A (animal) images — or more complicated ratios, such as the very important ratio of form-dominated color responses to color-dominated form responses.

But by and large the hardest part comes in the fourth, and final, phase — "Interpretation." Though the interpretative project has been extended to an extraordinary number of other domains, including patterns of self-perception and styles of ideation, the core



interpretative idea was and remains what Rorschach called the "experience type" (*Erlebnistyp*). Specifically, Rorschach set up an opposition between a framing pattern of experience that is intense in attachments and rich in inner life, on the one side, and one that was more extensive, outwardly directed, and impulsive in affect, on the other. By studying the articulation and maintenance of these *types*, we can begin to sketch the contours of a new self, one very different from the aggregate faculty-self of the mid-to late nineteenth century. But before entering into that discussion, it is worth pausing (all too briefly) to locate Rorschach himself at that evanescent crossing point of Swiss psychoanalysis, sociology, psychometrics, and physiological psychology.

#### *Territory of the Test*

Not a great deal is known about Rorschach; there is little doubt that the historian of the unconscious Henri Ellenberger produced one of the best, admiring articles about the master of the inkblot. Intriguingly, Ellenberger has three origin stories. The first is a kind of fate-by-name: it seems that young Rorschach (*sans blague*) actually carried the nickname "Klex" as a child, after the inkblot parlor game that he apparently so loved. Justinus Kerner had popularized the genre with his inkblot plates accompanying his lugubrious 1857 book of poetry (*Klecksographien*). *Klecks* means "to daub," and mediocre paintings were often known as *Kleckse*, *Kleckerei*.<sup>7</sup> Ellenberger's second origin story takes place at the height of Rorschach's medical training in Zurich and Neuchâtel (he graduated in 1906). It seems that the inkblot emerged as if in a dream, in Rorschach's reporting a dream after viewing the autopsy of a human brain:

The dissecting of the brain interested me particularly, and I joined to it all kinds of reflections about the localization and the cutting up of

the soul. The deceased had been an apoplectic; the brain was cut in transverse slices. The following night I had a dream in which I felt my own brain was being cut in transverse slices. One slice after another was cut off from the mass of the hemispheres and fell forward, exactly as it had happened at the autopsy. These bodily sensations (I lack a more precise designation) were very clear, and the memory of that dream is even now fairly vivid.<sup>8</sup>

Rorschach used this dream in two related ways, both connected to the third origin story having to do with Rorschach's genial appropriation of local intellectual resources. The dream featured prominently in his doctoral work "On Reflex-Hallucinations and Kindred Manifestations" (November 1912), in which he addressed the problem of how hallucinatory experiences could exist when they corresponded to physiologically impossible states. Written in the framework of Eugen Bleuler's associationism, Rorschach's paper was also tied to the experiments of a rather odd Norwegian psychologist who explored the ways in which constrained physical states induced movement in dreams. (He tied up sleeping students.) Over the next decade, Rorschach returned again and again to this reciprocal relation between external and internal motility.

In Carl Jung's orbit, the purely physiological and ideational were never enough by themselves. By 1911, Rorschach had, on one side, begun linking his work on hallucinations to symbolism. On the other, he had launched a program of experimentation, allowing patients not only to paint but also to free-associate both to paintings and to inkblots (on the model of and comparison with Jung's word-association test).<sup>9</sup> During the years after 1911, he analyzed artwork for its inner meanings, as in his "Analytic Remarks on the Painting of a Schizophrenic," where the artist-patient gave all the Last Supper diners the long hair typical of women except Judas. Rorschach took his research out of the clinic

too: as in his sociopsychological examination of Johannes Binggeli's *Waldbruderschaft*, a Swiss cult in which Binggeli taught the initiated that his penis was sacred and worthy of adoration. These inquiries led Rorschach to a cultural psycho-geography in an effort to understand the schizophrenic cult leader as a type preferentially arising on the disputed boundaries between the racial groups of Switzerland.<sup>10</sup>

From 1915 to 1922 (the period in which he wrote *Psychodiagnostik*), Rorschach worked at the Heil- und-Pflege-Anstalt in Herisau, the cantonal asylum of Appenzell (eastern, German-speaking Switzerland). All around in this period there were psychological studies of image associations, but one could not be ignored. A Polish student of Bleuler (Rorschach's own adviser), Szymon Hens, had experimented on inkblots (still as a test of imagination but now administered to mentally ill as well as normal patients), work he completed for his doctoral thesis in 1917.<sup>11</sup> Jolted in part by Hens's thesis publication, Rorschach returned to his old investigations of 1911 and tried to organize a psychoanalytical society that would eschew the parochial views of any single approach.

Rorschach's search for neutrality marks his work from his theoretical aims and his efforts to found an ecumenical society to the detailed design of his "random" images.<sup>12</sup> In part, that hunt for neutrality issued from the Swiss psychologists' precarious location between the larger schools of Austria, Germany, and France. Even within Switzerland, Rorschach seems always aware of the powerful gravitational forces pulling the field toward such figures as Eugen Bleuler, Carl Jung, and Ludwig Binswanger. This search for autonomy (intellectual and epistemic) dominated Rorschach's 1919-1921 correspondence with Walter Morgenthaler, his friend and former senior colleague from his stint at the Waldau Mental Hospital (summer 1914 - October 1915). Immediately on leaving

Waldau, Rorschach became head doctor at the institute and asylum of Herisau in the canton of Appenzell; in Herisau, from 1919 to 1921 he fought a pitched battle to bring his blots into print. Throughout, Morgenthaler remained both a sympathetic mentor and a go-between in the publishing process. (Morgenthaler himself was then in the midst of an effort to publish a work at the boundary of art and psychiatry on the art-brut painter and convicted schizophrenic child molester Adolf Wölfli.) Like Rorschach, Morgenthaler desperately sought a neutral methodological ground on which to locate this boundary work between art and psychiatry. In fact, the senior psychologist told Rorschach that he hesitated to join the Psychoanalytic Society (of which Rorschach was slated to be vice president) because he feared that the organization would fall sway to a parochial orientation. Morgenthaler wrote:

What has kept me away until now, and still does, is the fear of having to adopt a single orientation and losing the freedom to take individual positions regarding different problems and findings, as I do now. In my opinion, Freudian theories have grown out of their early stage when they did need to be cared for and discussed within special societies. Freudian theory has fully permeated psychology and psychopathology and has become, particularly for me, one method of psychotherapy among all the others.<sup>13</sup>

Maintaining neutrality was essential, Rorschach agreed, but "in the present union there is no danger that the spirit of bondage will penetrate. Even if Freud here and there appears with an all too papal nimbus, the danger of becoming a hierarchy can best be avoided if people come together who interact and have a sense for various viewpoints."<sup>14</sup>

As for the blots, Rorschach insisted that the printer (Ernst Bircher) produce them with a uniformity and accuracy that would



avoid any deviations; Morgenthaler was a consultant and go-between on these publishing plans. "If he makes difficulties about the blots, then the matter is finished," Rorschach insisted in January 1920 to Morgenthaler, "because the special publication makes sense to me only if really all of the blots are genuinely reproduced as much as possible, so that the total represents a test apparatus."<sup>15</sup> As became clear, Rorschach not only considered the uniformity of the prints to be significant; he also had inscribed in the plates themselves a very specific notion of color, symmetry, size, and density. Late in March 1920, Rorschach related his printing woes to Morgenthaler, citing the contract, which specified the reproduction of ten colored blots: "Of these blots, 5 are black, 2 are black/red, 1 has 3 colors, 1 has 4 colors, and 1 has 8 colors. [The contract must] indicate that the reproduction of plates be *true to the original plates*: size, number of colors, etc. have to correspond to the original plates. Otherwise, naturally, the whole has no meaning."<sup>16</sup>

Every aspect of the plates had to be purged of manifest allusion to extraneous bits of visual culture. Otherwise patients — especially ill ones — would latch on to some perceived referential bit of the plate even before engaging with the image. Rorschach explained to Morgenthaler on April 18, 1921:

Eventually, I will put a note on the blots folder describing how they can be glued on fabric. . . . As you will see, it is preferable that the picture is not bordered by the canvas (fabric) and instead gets glued on it so that the fabric should be no more than 3 mm over the border of the blot. When there is a darker border, especially if it is on the surface, it induces some depressed patients to have the impression that it is a "death announcement." And this diminishes further their already feeble ability to associate.<sup>17</sup>

It was not that Rorschach wanted to preempt the depressed patient from lugubrious associations; open-ended association was, after all, the entire goal of the enterprise. Instead, the "death announcement" frame would, in Rorschach's view, so deepen the depressed subject's state that the poor soul would be voided of the little free energy he possessed, making it impossible to see the blot *as* anything at all. Association would fail. And the cards — all the cards — would become nothing but incapacitating harbingers of death.

Not only did these cards talk; they did so in virtue of their form and color down to the smallest detail. If the blots suggested even a shard of human design, certain patients would seize on that fragment, losing their own ability to speak from within. For this reason, nothing was more important to Rorschach than creating and reproducing cards that would register as undesigned designs, unpainted paintings: "[I]f the small printed border is not sufficiently precise on some of the blots [after cutting the sheets] or still partly visible here and there after pasting, the blot could still leave visible a small bit of intentionality [*Absichtlichkeit*], and there are [schizophrenics who] react very negatively to the tiniest bit of intentionality."<sup>18</sup> In order for the subject to speak, the card, and the card's author, had to find a perfect silence. This meant that every blot must be produced with exquisite care. Demanding fine adjustments even at galley-proof stage, Rorschach insisted with regard to one card that "the light tones, especially in the upper right, must be darker so that the color looks somewhat flatter."<sup>19</sup> Unintentional arbitrary form would emerge only by the extraordinary exertion of a determined and fully intentional design: an exquisite art of artlessness.

Even the title of Rorschach's book became a matter of contested neutrality. Morgenthaler pleaded with his young colleague to find something less modest — and frankly less unappetizing —

than "Method and Results of a Perceptual-Diagnostic Experiment (Interpretation of Arbitrary Forms)." What about "PSYCHODIAGNOSTIK"? Morgenthaler asked. Rorschach demurred, saying he was determined to emphasize the limited scope of the test and wanted a title that would not, by its use of German or philological invocations, "sound strange as almost to be mystical." He believed that a kind of positivist equipoise could be maintained in a system of neutral, associational diagnostics. This minimalism would protect the work from the overbearing claims of more ambitious projects:

Expressions such as "Psychodiagnostik" . . . go too far. I don't want to give the impression that one can make general psychograms with the experiment, and in that context I have tried to put the brakes on that idea in several places in the text. Perhaps later, when there is a norm created through controlled investigations, such an expression can be used. For now, though, it strikes me as too pompous.

Morgenthaler pleaded for the ambitious title, promising Rorschach he could display his modesty through the subtitle; in the midst of "these bad times" no one in his or her right mind would shell out twenty or thirty Swiss francs or a hundred German deutschemarks for "A Perceptual-Diagnostic Experiment." Rorschach "unhappily" ceded. *Psychodiagnostik* rolled off the press in 1921.<sup>20</sup>

Rorschach's neutralist inclinations were lost on no one. Some praised the scientific character that abstemiousness gave his work, while others found that his atheoretical approach limited the work. The phenomenological psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger, for example, wrote Rorschach in January 1922 first to praise the work as a natural science of emotional life and to characterize it in psychoanalytic terms. The anal-erotic character (according to Binswanger) registers certain sensations; those sensations (in Rorschach's language, the particular pairing of movement and color

sensations with an *Erlebnistyp*) could be further pursued as characterological features. But at the same time, Binswanger rejected Rorschach's reliance on association psychology and urged the young researcher to avail himself of the tradition of work issuing from Edmund Husserl (work, it should be said, that Binswanger had done much to promote). Indeed, Binswanger reminded young Rorschach that he had once confessed to Binswanger his desire to escape his "scientific autism" (*wissenschaftliche Autismus*). Rorschach deferentially replied that he knew it was high time to produce a theoretical gloss of his experiments and that he recognized the limitations of associationist psychology. Yet he admitted to a frustrated confusion about where to look for theoretical backing.<sup>21</sup>

Scientific autism notwithstanding, Rorschach's determined neutrality was key to the test's success. Freudians could use it; so could Jungians. Binswanger clearly saw uses for the new tool, as did Bleuler. In fact, just this flatness, this *dis*-association of the procedure from any "sectarian" school, blocks attempts to single out any one "origin" of the test. One of Rorschach's colleagues had previously written a paper comparing the ascription of meaning in the divination of water with the Jung word-association test. Surely that could be considered a "root." Another published on "unconscious picture riddles in the normal," letting patients associate, scribble, and find shapes.<sup>22</sup> That, too, could be a source. Rorschach's wife later recalled the pensive reverie into which her husband fell when they read together the passage (in a biography of Leonardo) about the images to be found in stones, cracks, ashes, and dying embers.<sup>23</sup> There was Bleuler's associationist psychology to reckon with (through which Rorschach was trained), as well as Hens's "formless picture" tests of visual-imaginative power in children, adults and the mentally ill. In the background, too, lurks the art of Rorschach's father, not to speak of Rorschach's own childhood fascination with Klexographie and the uses he made of

it (and the art-psychiatric link) in his earlier psychological studies. While it may be a useful project to try to attach coefficients of importance to each of these "origins," that project is not mine.

Instead, the crucial point is that the confluence of experimental associationist psychology, therapeutic use of pictures, and psychoanalytic notions of projection, introjection, and free association were, during the second decade of the twentieth century, more intensely studied in the three major clinics of Switzerland than anywhere else. The search for neutrality — Rorschach and his Swiss colleagues' hunt for an *überparteilich* epistemic stance — signaled an attempt to avoid the often bitter and parochial psychiatric battles that divided the profession. One could follow those internecine struggles into a comparative "reception history" of the Rorschach test, examining its changing status and use throughout Europe and the United States while attending to its differential acceptance among the various psychiatric schools. Here I will follow the neutrality question in another direction — with the goal of using inkblots to unravel the complex relation among subjectivity, objectivity, and inner life.

Most urgently: What logic of the self did the test embody? To approach that question is to treat the technology of self — its measure through the Rorschach system — not so much as a world-historical unfolding of the ethics of selfhood (as Michel Foucault has argued). Nor is it to expand the techniques of the self to include more than classical ethics, also the practical dimension of classical logic and physics (as Pierre Hadot has suggested in his criticism of Foucault). Instead, I am here principally concerned with a kind of technique of the self that is more local, more material. It means following the micro-establishment of the self, not in the abstract but in the routinized procedure followed in thousands of ordinary tests. In turn, this requires treating the Rorschach test not just as a set of plates but as plates situated within a system of charts,

tables, and graphs, of scripted questions, calculated indexes, and downloadable computer programs. Only then is it possible to ask what this system of procedures presupposes about the status of the self it aims to assess.<sup>24</sup>

This takes us to our last goal: to specify that notion of self that fits the Rorschach measurement technology. After all, measuring instruments and the objects they study often enter together: scan the heavens through a radio telescope, and the sky-scape lights up one way; look through an optical scope, and very different elements become its major features. By a measurement technology, I do not mean something as general as any abstract procedure. I have in mind technology in a more ordinary sense: a technology of the self as a grubbier, saturating, hands-on affair mixing charts, hardware, and procedures the way so many other measurement routines do. Navigation, microscopy, carbon-14 dating — all marshal complex mixtures of electronics, reference guides, and bits of the physical world. The Rorschach, too, combined a heterogeneous set of inputs as it came to be regularized through the standardization of cards, sitting, lighting, timing, presentation, scoring, and analysis. But there is this difference: by its ubiquity, the Rorschach test *saturates* contemporary culture in a way that the electron microscope does not. When Andy Warhol produced his enormous Rorschach canvases, he could count on our recognizing the genre as he playfully subverted authorship, meaning, interpretation — even the idea of his own fixed and determinate self.

#### *Interpreting Interpretation*

There is more than just a difference in procedure between the imaginarium of the mid- to late nineteenth century and the interiorism of the early twentieth. At every moment, the Rorschach test presupposed a different ontology of the self from the faculties (or powers) assumed by a timed test of rapid association. Most

important, for Rorschach the imagination is *not* the principal object of inquiry, though he expected that his subjects might think so: "Almost all subjects regard the experiment as a test of imagination. This conception is so general that it becomes, practically, a condition of the experiment. Nevertheless, the interpretation of the figures actually has little to do with imagination, and it is unnecessary to consider imagination a prerequisite." It is true that the test aims to *test* imagination, but it does so among many other characteristics: "*The interpretation of the chance forms falls in the field of perception and apperception rather than imagination.*"<sup>25</sup>

This raises a point of immense theoretical interest to those of us conversing with talking things. For nearly a century, the great centerline of philosophy of science has been the demarcation of "seeing" from "seeing as." Fundamental to the Gestalt psychologists, this division shaped discussions throughout the long run of neo-Kantian philosophical psychology all the way from Ludwig Wittgenstein and Thomas Kuhn through recent work in the sociology of science. Rorschach's intervention demands that "seeing" and "seeing as" be taken not as fundamentally alternative relations of perceiver to perceptions but as limiting tints at the edges of a full-color spectrum. Indeed, the archive of Rorschach overflows with cases in which "interpretation" is an inappropriate characterization. Organic cases of mental illness, people with senile dementia, paretics, epileptics, schizophrenics, many manics, almost all feebleminded, and many normals are simply not aware of the assimilative effort that registers the *difference* between perception and "seeing as." That is, *laut* Rorschach, the effort of integration gives rise to the conscious recognition of "interpretation" as such. If the threshold for the registration of that assimilative work is high, the cards are "seen"; if the threshold is low, the subject becomes conscious of interpretation and the cards are "seen as." Pedants and depressives, for example,

characteristically find the cards uniformly "changed" or "strange." Both are acutely aware of the interpretative act, since the reporting effort immediately crosses the low threshold of awareness.

The crucial point: Rorschach concluded that "*the differences between perception and interpretation are dependent on individual factors, not on general ones; that there is no sharp delineation, but a gradual shifting of emphasis; and that interpretation may be called a special kind of perception.*"<sup>26</sup> For brevity I use "apperception" as a shorthand for Rorschach's claim that perception relates to interpretation as genus to species. Setting aside for the moment the ultimate status of the Rorschach test (Is it "objective"?), it is possible to pursue some implications of this claim for apperception. First, it marks a shift in the logic of the self: *from* aggregate powers manipulating specific contents *to* a framing disposition in which experience is necessarily situated — self as form, not content. Second, using Foucault's language in a different context and now in ways that tie them together, it means that the functions of subjectivation (how subjects are formed) and objectivation (how objects are formed) enter at precisely the same moment. To describe the cards (on the outside) *is exactly* to say who you are (on the inside). Read one way, that link between perception and personality is a straight-ahead claim of psychometrics. But it is possible to take apperception in a different way, removed from the detailed and sometimes incompatible coding mechanisms of the various Rorschachian sects and their ferocious internecine battles. (School leaders Bruno Klopfer and Samuel Beck would not speak to each other.) Taking a more abstract and more historical perspective, one could say that the massive popularity of the Rorschach test over the course of the twentieth century signals (and conditions) a specific concept of self. That historical apperceptive self is picked out by its insistence on relations of depth and surface, inner and outer life, and the inseparability of ideation and affect.

The world of the apperceptive self is full of *very* talkative objects. In the late nineteenth century, a subject who sat mute before one of Professor Kirkpatrick's cards simply scored zero, not unlike a screw sorter incompetent to plunk a flat head into a different bin from a round head. In Rorschach's universe, the cards not only responded to every utterance; they had plenty to say if the subject remained silent or simply reported that there were two blobs of ink: "Occasionally neurotic subjects fail to answer; this is caused by inhibitions due to complexes." These complexes can be of various sorts, one of the most striking being the "color shock" that certain subjects exhibit when faced with several of the later cards. For example, in one case study one of Rorschach's subjects facing (color) plate 9 said, "I don't know, nothing much comes to me," to which Rorschach appended: "Suppression of color responses as expressed in color shock is a pathognomonic sign of neurotic repression of affect." Other kinds of subjects also occasionally refuse to answer; feebleminded hysterical subjects may not respond "because they are afraid they will give stupid answers; we deal with an 'intelligence complex.'" Schizophrenics ordinarily do not so much refuse *ab initio* to respond to color; instead, quite suddenly they refuse to carry on with responses at all.<sup>27</sup>

From Rorschach's time to the present, identifying schizophrenics has been an important goal of the test. In the last decades, this has meant tweaking the statistical package to maximize the overlap of schizophrenics diagnosed through the Rorschach test with individuals diagnosed through the checklist behavioral and affective criteria of *DSM-III* (the standard psychiatric guide). The Rorschach Schizophrenia Index formula is complex, involving the number of distorted forms and white spaces, along with the number of responses that exhibit extreme "dissociated, illogical, fluid, or circumstantial thinking":

- "It's the destituteness of the world, evil and hollow"
- "It's the universal hole of a female vagina"
- "It looks like two men have raped some stones"
- "It's a face with Cousteau's bra across the mouth"
- "It looks like the double twin two peaks of Mt. Rushmore"<sup>28</sup>

According to the Rorschach bible (Exner's three-volume reference work), a score of 4 on the SCZI (Schizophrenia Index) is cautionary; at 6 or 7 the diagnosis begins to overlap almost entirely with one made according to *DSM-III*.

Although Rorschach wanted to diagnose pathology (and in various aspects of normal intelligence, affect and ideation), by far his greatest interest was in the axis separating kinesthetic responses suggesting human movement (M) and responses emphasizing color (C). A subject of "above average attainments" (university graduate, twenty-nine years old) had a very high level (97 percent) of highly resolved forms (F+); six movement-indicating responses; no pure-color responses; no responses first identified by form and then by color (FC); and only two responses that were in the first instance color-oriented, secondarily implicating form (CF). Schematizing hundreds of such particular cases, Rorschach laid out the two extrema as ideal types:

<b>Kinaesthesias Predominant (Introversive)</b>	<b>Color Predominant (Extraversive)</b>
More individualized intelligence	Stereotyped intelligence
Greater creative ability	More reproductive ability
More "inner life"	More "outward" life
Stable affective reactions	Labile affective reactions
Less adaptable to reality	More adaptable to reality
More intensive than extensive rapport	More extensive than intensive rapport
Measured, stable motility	Restless, labile motility
Awkwardness, clumsiness	Skill and adroitness <sup>29</sup>

Although Rorschach seems to have tried, in his prose, to remain clinically neutral between the two *Erlebnistypen*, his preference for the human-kinesthetic "M type" is visible on just about every page of his work. Introversion, as he calls it, is related to but not quite the same as similar-sounding concepts that Freud and Jung had advanced. For Freud, introversion was characterized by the deflection of love from a real love object to an internal fantasy world; at first, Jung generalized the notion but kept it pathological: introversion was supposed to be the manifestation of an expanded libido (the will in Arthur Schopenhauer's sense) redirected from outside to inside in such a way that "the inner world gains in (personal) reality to the same extent that the (universal) reality loses in emphasis and determining power."<sup>30</sup> Subsequently, Jung dropped the taint of pathology from introversion, but Rorschach wanted to go further, raising the "introversive type" above the normal to the top of the existential heap.

Similarly, Freud's notion of projection, used in 1895 and 1896 in a pathological setting, reenters as a "normal" aspect of the psyche in the metapsychology of 1913 (*Totem and Taboo*). Freud famously cast God as the psychological projection of the father; beginning in 1939, it became increasingly common to refer to the Rorschach test itself as projective (though Rorschach, who had long since died, never used the term).<sup>31</sup> Now, while there are clearly projective elements in Rorschach's conception, the underlying idea is actually more radical than that; it is that the axis projection-perception, like the axis perception-interpretation, is *empirical*. Be that as it may, in its manifold uses during the 1930s and after, the test clearly became a useful phenomenological accessory for the psychoanalytic community.

This extrication of the test from the "sectarian" orientation of Freud and Jung (or for that matter any other major school) is, I believe, essential for understanding the extraordinary widespread

appropriation of the test. It meant that Rorschach could seize an already existing "market" for psychoanalytic reasoning about the unconscious (such as introjection, projection, and the detailed dynamics of symbolic representation). It fitted equally well with Jungian word-association tests and dovetailed neatly with Bleuler's associationism. But in borrowing from his own psychiatric training, Rorschach stripped away much Freudian psychoanalytic specificity: no ego, no id, no superego in their full theoretical configuration. This question of the uptake of Rorschach's test merits much greater consideration, but now back to the *Erlebnistyp*.

"Introversive" in Rorschach's terms meant having the ability to turn in toward oneself, not necessarily being fixed in a state of introversion. This ability to find emotional resources *within* defined the type. By contrast, the "C[olor] type," or "extratensive," experienced the world through an outer-directedness, a restless motility, and unstable affective reactions.<sup>32</sup> On the basis of the relative weight of M-type and C-type responses, the Rorschach test aimed (and aims) to display the balance between these two ideal types. Even so, the *Erlebnistyp* does *not* and should not reveal

*what* [the subject] experiences, but, rather, *how* he experiences. We know many of the traits and characteristics with which he goes through life, be these of associative or emotional nature, or a mixture of the two. We do not know his experiences; we do know the apparatus with which he receives experiences of subjective or objective nature, and to which he subjects his experiences in assimilation of them.<sup>33</sup>

The *Erlebnistyp* is not a complete picture of the psyche (a psychogram); instead, the type shows how experiences are conditioned. It might be thought of as a psychological inflection of



neo-Kantianism extended to affect, with a slogan like this: there is perception, affect, or ideation outside these conditions of possible experience.

Unlike Kant's categories considered in their transcendental function, Rorschach's *Erlebnistyp* varies from individual to individual, over the course of a lifetime, and between racial and even sub-cantonal groups. Nonetheless, the variations fall within the space of Rorschach's parameters. Put another way (not Rorschach's): the human personality exists in an experiential type-space analogous to the three dimensions of form, movement, and color. Personality (*Charakter*) is neither determined by nor entirely immune to external experience. For example, important as it is, disciplined thinking is an acquired trait, and it shows up on the projective test in a statistical tendency to proceed in an orderly manner, for instance, from analysis of wholes to analysis of parts. *Charakter* (whether introversive or extratensive) is made up of the "inherent, primary qualities of the constitution."<sup>34</sup>

Because the inner characterological structure of the individual is a hybrid of exterior conditioning and intrinsic structure, Rorschach registers changes on many levels. Individual *mood* can shift the Rorschach registration: a transient depressed mood shoves a person toward the introversive end of the scale, a miniature version, so to speak, of clinical depression. Observing a subject over the course of a lifetime, Rorschach also saw characteristic flow of the young child from extratensive toward intratensive, then back out in later life toward extratensive. *Groups*, too, could bear their own statistical distribution of experience types. Early in his career, Rorschach explored what he considered characteristic differences between the extratensive Appenzeller of eastern Switzerland (whom he clearly disliked) and the introversive Bernese (with whom he identified). Schizophrenic Bernese fell more easily into a catatonic state, and their delusions were more florid, mythical, and isolated;

the Appenzeller usually manifested the disease through more conventional delusions without losing social contact.

When *Psychodiagnostik* appeared in 1921, Rorschach was ready to expand the study to racial contrasts, an enthusiasm that permeated testing of all sorts in the 1920s and remained a standard part of comparative anthropology well into the 1960s. Even disciplining experience could, within bounds, alter responses. The bureaucracy could clearly pull a person toward the repressed end of the spectrum, a circumstance that could either encourage certain tendencies or conflict badly with an already established personality. More generally, the manipulation of the outside ("fonction du réel") could alter the frame of experience: "Rhythmic, staccato speeches, 'worldly' music with powerful rhythms, rhythmic flag-waving, and in the center the bright red blouse of the old general. This is certainly no 'turning in on oneself.'"<sup>35</sup>

As the Rorschach system was modified into its canonical "comprehensive" form in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, the *Erlebnistyp* became the "cornerstone" of evaluating decision-making patterns more generally. Introversives (high M) tended to prefer precise, uncomplicated logical systems, with all alternatives laid out in advance; extratensives (high C) mix thinking and feeling much more thoroughly, giving rise to more complex cognitive patterns and a greater inclination to reverse decisions. Too sharp a weighting on one side or the other correlated with inflexible problem solving.<sup>36</sup> That was not all. Over the decades, the number of variables increased enormously — not only vast compilations of plots exhibiting possible details and patterns for each card but new categories altogether. Textures and blends, among other variables, entered, along with a raft of specific ratios and clusters.

When I say the Rorschach test is a technology, I mean it. Testers have long been able to reach for the 741-page *Index of Rorschach Responses*, for example, and draw on the twenty-thousand

responses — sorted by keyword, content, and card segment — given by five hundred or so Johns Hopkins medical students during the 1950s.<sup>37</sup> A more up-to-date tool enters with the personal computer: costing about \$595, a computer scorer will compile scores into various compilations, clusters, and statistical correlations and *interpret* the results following one of the standardized approaches.

Here is an excerpt from the advertised selling points of one popular routine:

- Unlimited-use software automatically generates an on-screen Structural Summary and Sequence of Scores, both of which can be printed.
- Professionally formatted narrative report provides interpretive hypotheses based on the individual's responses.
- If a Structural Summary report would not be valid due to a low number of responses, RIAP4 Plus will still generate the client's raw data and constellations, but without any ratios, percentages, or derivations.
- You have the option to select which sections of the report will be generated: Structural Summary, Sequence of Scores, and/or sections of the Interpretive Report.
- Memo fields facilitate recording of general notes to complement, refine, and personalize the interpretive report.<sup>38</sup>

To give an idea of the kind of interpretation that the automatic scorer produces (much shortened by me), here are a few excerpts. This is an automatically produced case file built on the record of a twenty-seven-year-old man tested in March 1999:

The following hypotheses are listed solely to provide an initial orientation to some of the data in this record. A full analysis of the data is

required to confirm or reject their validity. No summary or synopsis is intended.

He has an inflated sense of self-worth. Many psychological operations are used to protect and defend the ego. The person's style of coping with problems is extratensive. There are indications of affective distress relating to depressive features. Problems with interpersonal relationships or cognition are evident. He has problems with processing information. Considerable pessimistic or negative thinking is present. Problems involving the need for interpersonal closeness are likely. He is avoiding or being excessively cautious about emotionality....

**Suicide Potential:** → *The Rorschach indicates a very strong suicide risk.* The SCON [suicide constellation of statistical factors] at this level has a very small probability of error in predicting a fatal suicide attempt. **Take precautions!**

**Endogenous Depression:** A diagnosis of major affect disorder or dysthymic disorder should be considered, especially if the history is positive. However, this value of the DEPI [Depression Index] may falsely indicate depression, may simply indicate recurrent depressive features, or may detect precursors to depression not yet clinically evident. Psychosomatic or anxiety symptoms may express the underlying disruptive affect. Dysphoric ideation is likely. His underlying attitudes, expectations, and views of life and self may be pessimistic, negative, and self-defeating. His coping style suggests depressive symptoms of confused and constrained painful feelings, intellectualization, and devaluation of self-worth.

His strongly dysphoric thinking about himself and the world may be the result of very hurtful or damaging past experiences. His self-concept may include feelings of vulnerability, incompetence, or

inadequacy. His negative attitudes stem from early developmental experiences, are persistent, and resist change, making it hard for him to use simple support or consolation.<sup>39</sup>

Of course, the computer did not produce this evaluation on its own. Seventy-five years of psychiatry work, clinical observation, and experimental work lie behind this output. One sees traces of the original Rorschach language ("extratensive") in the report, but much else besides. Behind the computer program lay long years of statistical studies that were used in the creation of indexes (such as proclivity to attempt suicide, "SCON," and the degree of depression, "DEPI"), in the process of which the studies were cross-correlated back to other psychiatric theories and classifications. But the very existence (and popularity) of such "automatic" scoring mechanisms buttresses the experience of neutrality that Rorschach himself sought. Here, at last, was a routinized system of card deployment that at nearly every stage appeared to sidestep the immediate involvement of anyone but the subject. The patient looked at the blots and reported on what he saw, and the card machine then scored, evaluated, and located him in a complex space of forms of perception: "negative attitudes," "dysphoric thinking," "vulnerability," "resist[ance to] change," problems "processing information," low "self-worth," and, most menacing of all, in that dangerous corner of interpretation, a very likely candidate for suicide. The cards have spoken.

#### *Subjects and Objects*

Staring into the inkblot, we can begin to make out very different structures in its use. Since the time of Leonardo, "chance" images have held pride of place as exercises of the imagination, signs of provocation to the imaginative gift. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, inkblots found a special place in the examination

armamentarium: a faculty-specific test of the imagination alongside tests of the various other faculties. Because the test aimed to measure the *specific* power of the imagination, it reinforced the faculty-psychological concept of self. No better way to reinforce the reality of an object than to measure it, collate it, compare it, publish it — over and over. But a full-bore inquiry into the technology of self in the Binet era (up to and including Szymon Hens) would have to go much further than anything I have done here; it would take each of the "powers" (and its appropriate test) to track the history of its hypostatization. If we had such a history, it would constitute part of a technological history of the late-nineteenth-century aggregate self.

The Rorschach test presupposes a very different ontology of self. There is no atomistic separation between *any* of the faculties or powers. Take imagination. In Rorschach's inkblot world, imagination simply is not a well-defined *power*; nothing in the test presupposes an organ, so to speak, of imagination. Indeed, for Rorschach, imagination manifests itself in the experience frame of the introversive in a way very different from that of the extratensive. For the introversive, who perceives reality more clearly than the extratensive, there is a tone of pleasure to the interpretative act: interpretations are complicated, the task is a game. For the extratensive, there is little pleasure here — perhaps a triumph, because of the brilliance of a performance as received by others — because the extratensive (in the limiting case) may not even realize that he or she is interpreting; the act may more resemble confabulation.<sup>40</sup>

In general, cognitive features in the Rorschach system (such as the degree of rigidity in problem solving or the diversity of logical forms of argumentation) do *not* live separately from affective features (such as relation to other people, vigilance, or aggression). One might think here of similarly deflationary pictures of reason

in Friedrich Nietzsche or in Freud, Freud having famously remarked, "The ego is no longer master in its own house." But it was the Rorschach test in its multiplied, routinized form that *automated* this "X ray of the mind" in such a way that the mental powers and affective structures were fundamentally linked. I suspect that it is precisely this automaticity that makes displays like the RIAP4 Plus report I quoted so uncanny (in Stanley Cavell's sense of simulating the human). You say: I see these colors, these figures, these movements, these shadings. The card machine replies at the speed of computation: You are obsessive, isolated, disordered in your thinking, and should be placed under suicide watch.

Objectivity, as it was understood, demanded routinization. Routinization pulled intervention from observation and worked all out to make science into a machine. Not surprisingly, many psychologists pushed the test toward such a mechanical procedure, from precise reproduction of inkblots to detailed scoring manuals, from scripted inquiries to computed statistical summaries and automated interpretations. The apparatus of social-scientific objectivity entered again and again in the research of nearly a hundred years of Rorschach studies that have probed the validity and reliability of the test. Predictions are perhaps the clearest indicators of validity, and psychologists have duly pounced on them to study the correlation between Rorschach test results and such observables as future academic success, psychiatric consultation, or attempted suicide. But validity could be addressed in other ways too — for example, comparison of Rorschach results on color shock with physiological indicators such as skin conductivity as an indication of emotional distress. Experimenters have even tried administering the test with the subject under hypnosis or mood-altering drugs to see if the results altered in expected ways. Tests of reliability (robustness of the results) have been

undertaken by splitting the test in two parts, by retesting after thirty days, by having different judges match scores and interpretations from many different subjects.<sup>41</sup>

But behind this vast industry of validity and reliability assessments, behind the volumes of indexed responses and statistical compilations, lay a concept of a unified self with dynamic relationships among its various components: a self for which perception was always through an inseparable complex of reason and affect; an interior self for which it was appropriate to speak of private experience. Although present from the start of Rorschach's research around 1920, this "Rorschach self" (so to speak) crystallized around Lawrence K. Frank's identification of the test as *projective* in an extraordinarily influential article of 1939. From that point forward, the ontological structure of the self acquired a visual-physical representation that has been repeated ever since. Likening Rorschach tests to standard beams of X rays or polarized light, Frank contended that an "individual personality" resembled the sample probed by these beams. Suddenly he — and we — could imagine the self like a test object: "The subject . . . is made to bend, deflect, distort, organize, or otherwise pattern part or all of the field in which it is placed." That deviation characterized the subject, be it a thick film of carbon fibers or the perceptual apparatus of a delusional schizophrenic. Frank wrote:

We elicit a projection of the individual personality's *private world* because he has to organize the field, interpret the material and react affectively to it. [A] projection method for the study of personality involves the presentation of a stimulus-situation designed or chosen because it will mean to the subject, not what the experimenter has arbitrarily decided it should mean (as in most psychological experiments using standardized stimuli in order to be "objective"), but rather whatever it must mean to the personality

who gives it, or imposes upon it, his private, idiosyncratic meaning and organization.<sup>42</sup>

A personality “is the way an individual organizes and patterns life situations” and “structuralizes his life space”; it shapes the way the subject perceives cloud pictures, amorphous clay shapes, or music. As such, personality is a “process,” not an entity or an “aggregate of traits, factors, or [a] static organization.”<sup>43</sup> The contrast is stark: older Binet-style tests assumed the existence of a self *exactly* defined through such entities — an aggregate of fixed traits or powers.

Frank took the projective test to be modeled closely on recent developments in physics, chemistry, and biology. Physicists, he argued, had gone beyond the older, purely statistical methods (such as reading the temperature of a gas from a thermometer) by developing devices such as the cloud chamber and the Geiger counter that were capable of studying individual atomic processes and structures one by one. Now the Rorschach test promised to do just that for the individual psyche. It would be an X ray of the mind in the analogical sense that the individual’s characteristic scattering (mode of perception) altered the “test beam” (inkblots) in measurable ways. In the field of meanings, symbols, and values, Rorschach’s plates promised a glimpse into the complex internal dynamics of the self.

### *The World Is a Test*

As the Rorschach came to be a diagnostic tool deployed in an ever-expanding number of contexts, its categories were naturalized. In the Second World War, the Americans adopted the test as a standard entry exam for many kinds of service. Germans used it to test for racial type in their racial settlement (and annihilation) in the conquered East. When the Nazi war criminals took the test

in their holding cells, the tests entered a long debate over the psychology and sociology of evil.<sup>44</sup> More proximately, Rorschach tests have had a long history in assisting counselors in their provision of career advice in schools and companies. And in the courts, the plates continued to figure in forensics, from custody battles to sex crimes. Beyond its practical uses, the inkblot system has become a symbolic technology; the locution “something is a ‘Rorschach’” has by now been lodged in the everyday speech of all the European languages. Far more than the widely used thematic apperception test or the word-association test, the Rorschach is truly a *saturating technology*, one that, by its visual omnipresence, meanders through the rhetoric of literature, art, and politics. At that powerful intersection of the literal and the metaphoric, the Rorschach test reinforces our sense that there is a complementary relation between an objective, neutral “test pattern” of the original inkblot and the subjective distortion of that pattern by our internal patterns of perception. We have learned — in no small measure through this specific technology — to envision the self alternately as a filtered camera and as a powerful projector.

Of course, the Rorschach test did not rotate the self from aggregate to apperceptive all by itself. The late-nineteenth-century history of “inner life” is a vast subject, one that includes cultural and social changes across many domains; this was a period in which new forms of domestic architectural space, family dynamics, autobiographical narratives, mass media, and political culture all took hold. But within this broader shift, the Rorschach test has played a dual role: it both reflected this new interiority and, more actively, provided a powerful assessment procedure, a universally recognized visual sign, and a compelling central metaphor.

If technologies of the self like the Rorschach are to be addressed head-on, then their histories must enter *with* our accounts of



scientific epistemology. It is impossible to speak about the history of objectivity (the ideal of a world imagined without us) without bringing the assumed nature of subjectivity (as a distorting lens) into the picture. Conversely, no account of Rorschach subjectivity (how we characteristically perceive our world) would be possible without a concomitant characterization of objectivity (how the world is without that distortion). We therefore need a *joint* epistemic project addressing the historically changing and mutually conditioning relation of "inside" and "outside" knowledge.

In Rorschach's time, such a joint inquiry might begin by examining the precise inner state deemed appropriate for objective scientific work. A clue can be found in Rorschach's *Psychodiagnostik*, where he insisted, "Coartivity [constriction of affect] is necessary if there is to be talent in the field of systematic scientific endeavor. . . . Maximum coartation leads to empty formalism and schematisation."<sup>45</sup> Here is yet another example of Rorschach's deep-seated conviction that affect and reason are inseparably bound. Intriguingly, Rorschach's view that the ideal scientist avoids "maximum coartation" suggests a turning away from *both* an ideal of automatic representation (the pure rule-driven mechanical objectivity) *and* an entirely rigid and emotionally constricted self. Purely cognitive powers — such as rule following, memory, and computation — would seem to be inadequate for significant science. I suspect — though it would take much more to show it — that the early twentieth century marked a dramatic transition from the pair mechanical objectivity:aggregate self to judgmental objectivity:apperceptive self. One would then correlate this break with another, equally important development. In field after field, scientists after 1920 explicitly began decrying the sterility of "purely objective" images of natural-scientific objects. In magnetograms of the sun, in X rays of the skull, in electroencephalograms of the brain, and bubble-chamber pictures of particle

physics, experimenters demanded that images be modulated by *subjective* judgments.<sup>46</sup>

True, many Rorschach experimenters aimed to render their test more and more mechanical by employing computer programs, reference atlases, and untrained clerks. In this sense, the test was becoming a quintessential objective measure of the subjective frame of experience: an aporia of the subjective self. But just at the moment when the Rorschach system seemed to be tumbling toward a pure automaticity, many leading voices in the field protested against such rule-bound interpretation. Marguerite R. Hertz, one of the most respected Rorschach authorities, put it this way in her summary essay for the insistently lab- and statistically oriented book *Rorschach Science* (1962):

The various studies based on short cuts and sign approaches cannot be considered clinically valid or acceptable. [When] patterns are applied mechanically . . . all evaluation of the dynamics of personality is excluded. This is a distortion of the Rorschach method. Clinically, results are sterile. . . . Those who emasculate the method with the view to giving it to clerks to handle are doing much to keep the Rorschach from attaining full scientific status.<sup>47</sup>

In ways that remain underappreciated, *judgment* came to reign at the vital intersection of the subjective and the objective.

The Rorschach system functions at this intersection of self and world, subjectivity and objectivity. These ten cardboard plates remain a remarkable technology, reaching as they do into the domain of the objective by their unformed, chance images and at the same time into the very core of private desires. At every moment, these plates take what we say about them and speak back to us about our innermost selves, through specific results *and* through the saturating metaphor of a self that projects, distorts,



transmits. Rorschach himself suggested that the system he was proposing modeled perception in a way that was not restricted to inkblots. Back in 1921, he emphasized the significance of an individual's choice in painting (expressionism versus impressionism, for example) as revelatory, just as he saw significance in the highly abstract reaches of philosophical preferences (Nietzsche versus Schopenhauer versus Kant). Rorschach's world of objects — and in many ways it is ours — is populated by a noisy, ventriloquized crowd. So do tell: What do you prefer?