

## ACTIVE IMAGINATION DURING THE USE OF THE RORSCHACH METHOD.\*

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### THE STIMULATION OF IMAGINATION.

THE Rorschach personality test is based on the stirrings of imagination. The interpretation of the structureless inkblots by the tested person stimulates his imagination in such a way that he projects his inner thoughts into the responses. Imagination is not merely one of the functions of a personality, but it is an expression of the personality as a whole. Medieval thinkers have described this by calling imagination "the star of man," by which they meant the essence of his personality. This is the reason why the Rorschach method is a valid test for the assessing of personality.

The Rorschach test, as is commonly known, uses the technique of verbal interpretation of inkblots. The person is asked to say what the inkblots might be. Imagination is especially stimulated through artistic creativeness, and on this phenomenon is based a Rorschach technique which uses paintings of Rorschach responses. The patients are asked to draw or paint what they have imagined. The ability to produce imaginative paintings is particularly great in children. According to Cizek this gift is most highly developed in children below the age of 10 years. Towards adolescence a decline of imagination usually sets in and the artistic gift is often lost in adulthood. Because of the artistic phase in childhood the technique of paintings of Rorschach responses yields particularly fascinating results in psychiatric work with children. One of the reasons why this is so lies in the fact, which was emphasized by Cizek and Viola, that the child wants to paint because he wants to tell a story. This is exactly what the psychotherapist is most interested in.

The technique of paintings of Rorschach responses should be applied after the performance of the usual Rorschach test. It consists in a number of procedures. The technique which should usually be applied at first is the production of a painting on a tracing. A tracing of the outlines of the blot is given to the child and he is asked to paint on the tracing where he saw the image and what he saw. Surprising and fascinating paintings are often obtained in this way. Frequently they give additional and unexpected information about the exact locations and determinants and represent excellent starting points for analytical exploration. They also reveal, especially on comparative studies of paintings of different children, a number of mental mechanisms which give new insight into the process of imaginative creativeness.

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The richness of imaginative material gained by tracings can be further increased by a technique which uses the phenomenon of "active imagination." The card is removed and a blank sheet is given to the child, who is asked: "Now paint what you saw—just as you like it."

#### THE MEANING OF "ACTIVE IMAGINATION."

"Active imagination" is a phenomenon related to free association. It was described by Jung and plays an important role in analytic psychological practice.

According to G. Adler one understands by active imagination "a definite attitude towards the contents of the unconscious. It is an attitude which can be best described as one of 'active passivity.' That is, one keeps completely passive and receptive to what is going to emerge from one's own unconscious, but at the same time focusses one's attention actively on what is going to happen. The emerging images show a certain autonomous life and movement. On concentration they can develop and acquire added characters, can form the nucleus for a group of other contents of the unconscious which gather round them. These processes are a spontaneous self-development of the original image and not artificial products intentionally invented. This is shown by the convincing sense of self-evident reality which active imagination conveys to the persons who experience it and also by the autonomy which they possess. This autonomy is most surprising. One finds very frequently that things happen contrary to everything one expected."

In a similar way Baynes described the process, which he called "active phantasying." He emphasized that during the development of spontaneous imagery, "some idea suddenly becomes commandingly relevant and that there is an astonishing certainty of aim." He also said that "the ideal condition for active phantasying is that of the child, as the work of psychological creation is essentially creative play, wherein the child and the man are again united."

Fordham said that "if a person simply lets his imagination work on his own and the correct time has been chosen to do this there follows a phantasy or series of imaginative events, either in the form of a drama in which the patient takes part as one of the figures and in which actions occur and conversations go on, or in that of a dance, or of a vision. The process can also be expressed through the media of painting, carving wood or modelling clay."

Frances Wickes pointed out that "into phantasy a conscious element enters—that is, a concentration upon the image so that it does not disappear again into the unconscious." She also mentioned that during "active phantasying we turn our attention to the inner world, and thereby energize the original image. The appearing figures have a life of their own, disconnected from our daily life and experience, and they behave in ways quite at variance with ours."

Summarizing, one can say:

1. Active imagination is an attitude which has two qualities: receptivity towards the content of the unconscious and conscious active concentration upon these contents.

2. Active imagination is characterized by the emergence of a commandingly relevant leading idea which gives the process direction and aim.

3. Active imagination is a process of focussing on an idea. It forms a nucleus for a group of other ideas which spontaneously gather or crystallize round it.

4. Active imagination is a phenomenon which possesses a certain autonomous life. Things frequently happen contrary to what one expected, and may be disconnected with our daily life.

5. Active imagination conveys a sense of self-evident reality to the person who experiences it.

6. Active imagination can, for instance, be expressed by telling a story, painting or drawing, modelling or carving, dancing or acting.

By asking the child to paint his Rorschach response "just as he likes it" a powerful stimulus is given to him for the development of active imagination. The original image is enriched and often new figures and ideas are created around it. Usually the difference between the child's painting on the tracing and from imagination is considerable. Sometimes, however, the painting on the tracing contains already very rich imaginative material and occasionally the child produces only little new material on painting from free imagination. The value of the paintings lies in two directions. Firstly, they often reveal much analytical material, and secondly they give opportunity to study mental mechanisms of artistic creativeness.

#### EXAMPLES.

The use of active imagination for analytical exploration will be illustrated by the following examples.

(1) A girl, aged 14 years, who had an I.Q. of 116, was referred because of lying and stealing. She saw in Card V "a vampire" and at the verbal inquiry she added: "It is flying." This is a very popular response, and her painting on a tracing showed on a superficial glance not much originality. On closer study, however, it showed a peculiarly restless design of the vampire's body which had obviously the purpose of evoking feelings of fear and horror. The vampire's face had somehow human features. When she was asked to concentrate on the vampire and to paint it just as it came into her mind, she produced a painting of an unusually-shaped window behind which a huge vampire was to be seen (Fig. 1). She said about this picture:

"It is the window of a castle. The vampire is after a person and flies all round but finds all the windows are closed. The window is a casement window with a sort of lattice work. I have seen such a window in my aunty's house; she is mummy's sister. Oh, mummy and aunty are always rowing; mummy acted as if she were two years old."

Paintings of Rorschach responses are often related to the subjects' dreams; indeed they are often painted dream-thoughts. When the girl described her painting of the castle and the vampire I was reminded of a dream which she used to have repeatedly when she was about 6 years old. This was the dream:

"I was in a cot and spiders were spinning webs all over the cot." Then the picture always changed and the second part of the dream continued in this way: "I was knitting as fast as I could, but could not keep up with mummy. I had the feeling of mummy's presence and she knitted faster than I did." These dreams were very frightening, and once her daddy woke her up. She was still half in the dream and said to him: "I have more knitting to do than mummy."

When she was asked whether she knew of a connecting link between the two parts of the dream she said: "I know—when spiders are spinning and closing in the webs get thicker and more matted and then give the appearance of knitting."

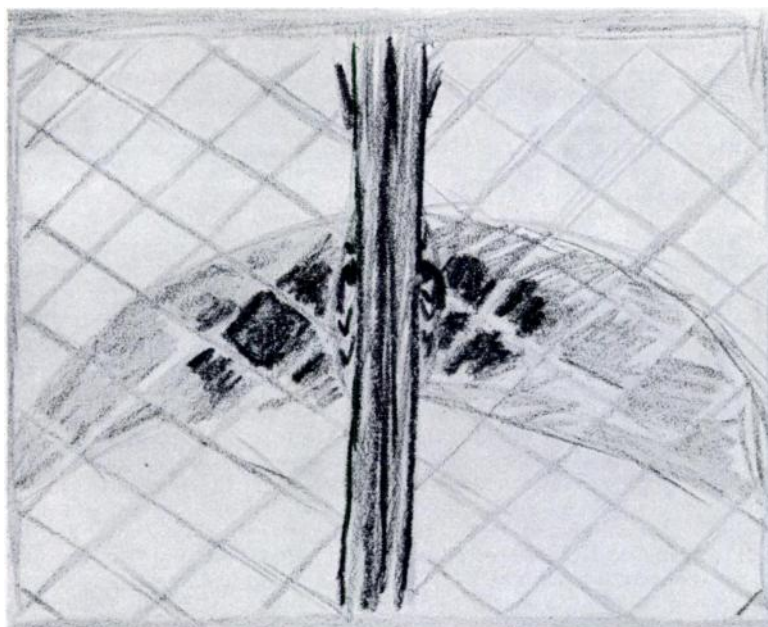


FIG. 1.—Card V—Active Imagination: "The casement window and the vampire."  
♀, 14 years. I.Q. = 116.

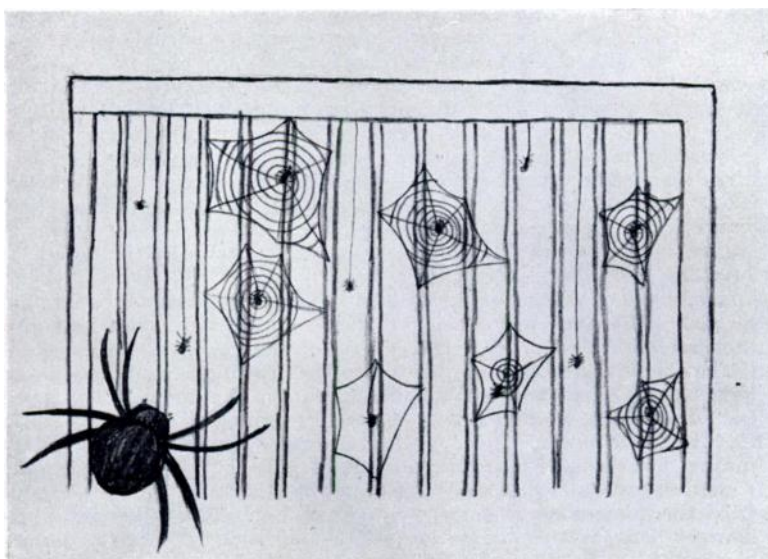


FIG. 2.—Drawing: "The dream of the cot and the spiders," ♀, 14 years.  
I.Q. = 116.

The girl had made a drawing of her dream of the cot and the spiders before the performance of the Rorschach test (Fig. 2). When I showed her this drawing and asked her if she found any similarity between the two pictures she became very thoughtful. She was a self-willed girl and not likely to say something which she did not really feel. "Yes," she said, in a convincing tone.

"The lattice work of the window does look something like spiders' webs which they spin when they close in. Yes, it is a bit like my old dream, the window frame is a bit like a bar of a cot. There might be something similar with spiders and vampires. They both haunt people in different ways."

Spider and vampire were mother symbols. Both the dream of the cot and the picture of the castle had a continuation in which the mother appeared even in person. The dream of the cot changed into the knitting scene with mother, and the free associations when she described the castle, led her at first to her mother's sister's house, and then to a criticism of her mother herself. This revealed that at the bottom of the girl's trouble was a difficult relationship between her mother and herself. The analysis of the girl's Rorschach picture helped in gaining understanding of this relationship.

(2) The same girl gave to Card III, in the reversed position, to its upper central part, the following response: "Trees in a country lane, hawthorn hedges on the sides. Shadows cast by the trees in the lane. Here would be the sun."

The picture on the tracing showed that the response was conceived with great vividness. The sun was seen in the white space above the trees and their shadows gave a marked feeling of space and depth. The production of distinct vista responses in children always deserves special interest. For the child, like the primitive person, has little sense for the third dimension, and the appearance of vividly seen perspective in Rorschach responses is, in addition to other meanings which it may have, often a sign of growth of maturity. This girl, being the only child, was brought up in grown-up surroundings and was in many ways mature beyond her age. Her vista response seemed to be an expression of her growing maturity and innermost thoughts related to it.

She made another picture of the country lane from free imagination. It was colourful, gay and beautiful and showed many new details. There were orange-red hawthorn bushes, yellow honeysuckle and yellow corn, pink and red berries, wild mauve thistles, two oak trees and an alley of poplar trees. The orange-red sun and black shadows added considerably to the three dimensional impression. The picture was also alive with animals. Squirrels populated the trees, and rabbits ran across the lane. Also, inanimate movement was represented by falling leaves. To this picture she gave the following free associations:

"It was in Sussex. A short, quiet country lane. I stayed there for summer holidays. I liked that way. My parents were not there. Once I walked there after dark. It is a short cut. All woods. There were rabbit warrens nearby. Of course, you got hot walking. I put my coat off, it was adventurous."

When she was asked what her first impression was when she saw the inkblot she replied: "Immediately after I looked at the blot I thought of rabbits in the bush, because of the darker patches." Now, rabbits played a very great role in her life, as she was a keen rabbit keeper and most interested in the detailed study of their breeding and litters.

The image of the country lane appeared to have great importance for the inner life of the girl. The analysis revealed that it signified a longing for happiness, freedom and adventure away from the control of the parents, and especially her mother. The theme of the rabbits pointed to the growing sexual consciousness of the adolescent girl. There was also a spiritual note in the image. The lane was a "way," a "direction," leading into a distance towards an "aim." It was her way of life into the future, as she sometimes dreamt of it.

(3) Another girl came to the clinic because of pilfering. She was 10 years and 3 months old and had an I.Q. of 94+. Her mother was a person of bad reputation and deserted the home when the girl was 6 years old. The father remarried and the relationship between the stepmother and the girl was very good; but the girl did neither forget nor forgive her mother.

On Card I she saw: "A lady. Her head is chopped off because she was careless on the road." On the tracing (Fig. 3) she painted the lady's body. Her frock was covered with blood. On the sides of it there was more blood, "because a car has run over her." On using active imagination she painted this scene with



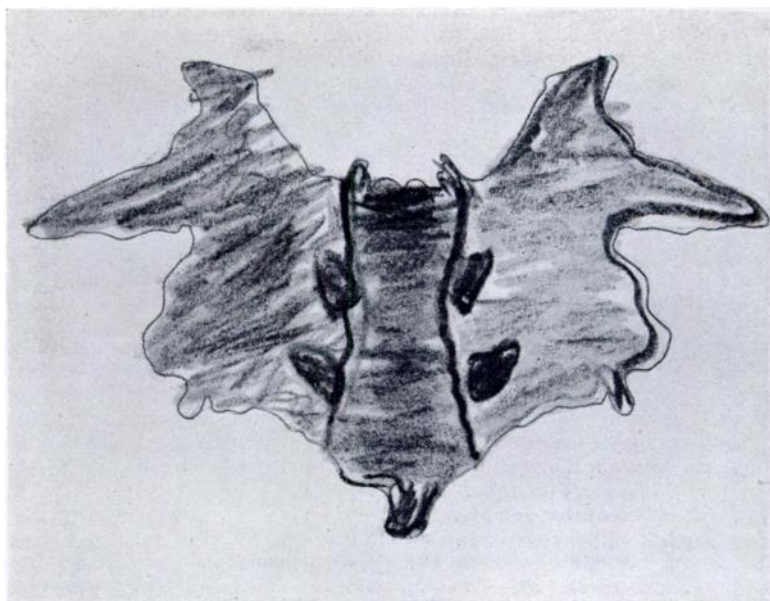


FIG. 3.—Card I—Tracing: "A lady with her head chopped off." ♀, 10 years 3 months. I.Q. = 94+.

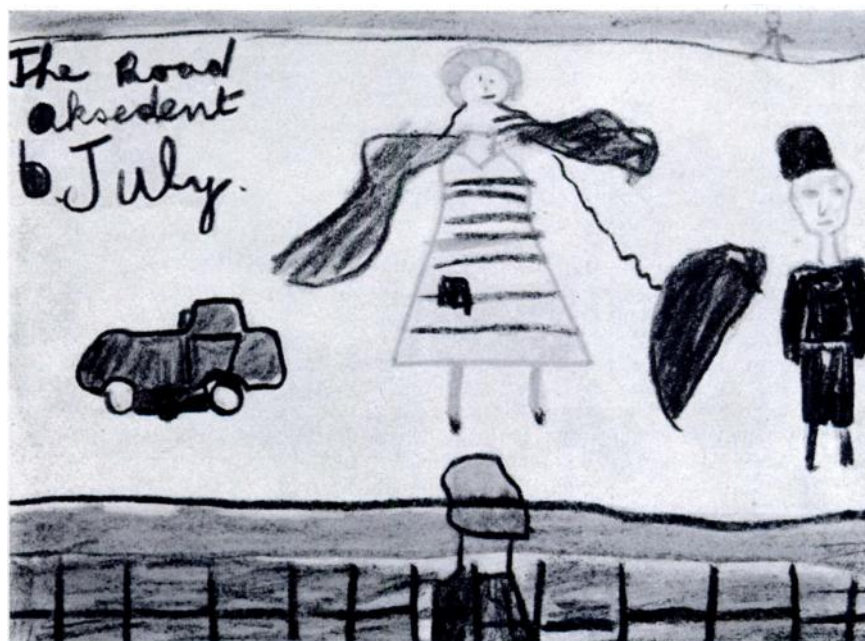


FIG. 4.—Card I—Active imagination: "The road accident." ♀, 10 years 3 months. I.Q. = 94+.

great vividness (Fig. 4). The lady had a "nice yellow frock." Blood ran profusely from both sides of her neck and a pool of blood collected on the pavement. Her severed head was seen too. She had fair hair. The car was to be seen in the distance. Standing by was a policeman clothed all in black. He said that "it was all her own fault." A little girl, coming from school, saw the accident. She heard the creak of the car's brake and screamed and fainted. Then she fell into another lady's arms.

This phantasy described the catastrophe of the child's infancy as she experienced it: her beautiful mother, meeting with a mortal accident, because of her own fault, as the authority of the policeman stated, and her little girl seeing all and fainting and falling into the arms of another lady, her stepmother.

(4) A boy of 13 years and 5 months was on probation because of homosexual activities. He was an artistic, sad-faced boy with an I.Q. of 112. On looking at Card II, the lower part of the central white space appeared to him like "a ravine, by the dip as it falls, a rocky ravine, it could be in America."

He was asked to sketch the ravine as he saw it in his phantasy. He made a deep gulf on the edge of which were spiky cactus. "It is dangerous," he said. His attitude towards his offence was further shown when he made up the following story about the ravine: "One day I and my friend were working along the rocky ledges of the ravine. My friend slipped and fell to his death." When I asked him if there was not another, more cheerful end to the story, he decidedly shook his head. "No. This was the story."

(5) An almost mentally defective boy of over 14 years, who was troublesome at his boarding school, said about the small lower centre detail of Card VII: "This looks like a church." He drew the church with pencil on the tracing. It had a steeple. "Tell me all about it" he was asked, "and paint it now bigger and as you like it."

Immediately he set to work. "The church is in Lancashire, Sir, near my home, Sir, it stands on a hill, I was so happy there." He painted the church standing on a beautiful hill which was overgrown with wild daffodils. A blue stream was flowing there. The sky was blue. The steeple had a round clock, which was like a sign of harmony. A boy was going to church.

The boy suffered from homesickness for his beloved home in Lancashire, which was the reason for his misdemeanour at the boarding school. This was movingly expressed by his painting. Since he made it he has happily returned to his home.

(6) A 13-year-old girl, who had an I.Q. of 127, made a painting from active imagination which was on a humorous note. Her problem was violent rages, and her obstinate wish to sleep in her parents' bed. Card IV looked for her like "a giant, a good giant, his name is Blunderbuss. He lives in a forest with his wife, Mrs. Blunderbuss is like Tom Thumb, because she is a dwarf." She painted the good giant who holds his tiny wife in his hands. This was a delightful unconscious allusion to the roles which in her mind her parents played in their relationship to each other and herself.

(7) A boy, aged 9 years and 11 months, with an I.Q. of 90, was very disobedient to his parents. His naughtiness developed after an attack of polio-encephalitis. He saw in Card I: "The devil springing from the wall." Whilst describing the devil he showed signs of fear of his own thoughts. His painting from imagination was outstanding because of the devil's big horns, of which he seemed to be particularly frightened.

After several months' treatment, when his condition was improving, this painting was again shown to him. The boy now told the following phantastic story; it revealed in a touching way his inner struggle, the role of his mother, whom he identified with the Holy Ghost, and his eventual victory.

"One day a little boy was naughty and his mother said to him: 'Be good or the devil will spring out of the wall.' But the little boy did not take any notice. Just then he saw a horn poke out of the wall, and all of a sudden he saw a big face coming out of the wall with big eyes and two horns, and all of a sudden the Holy Ghost looked upon the one with the horns and said, 'What are you doing?' And the devil said: 'Mind your own business!' But the Holy Ghost said unto him: 'Why do you frighten little boys? If you don't stop you will get into trouble.' But the devil took no notice and sprang up in a terrible rage. And the Holy Ghost said to himself: 'I will tell him that I shall set him on fire.' And all of a sudden the devil said: 'I heard what you said, I have big ears.'"

"And just then the boy began to be good and his mother said : ' You may go out and play now.' And the boy could not help thinking that somebody's eyes were looking upon him. And he heard somebody speaking to him : ' Why do Thou be naughty ? ' And the boy took notice and said : ' I will be good.' And so he said to his mother : ' I am going to be good for ever.' And so he was."

And so the little patient was. After this decisive session his mother reported such an improvement that the treatment could be terminated.

#### THE STUDY OF MENTAL MECHANISMS.

The second value of the use of active imagination in paintings of Rorschach responses consists, as was said before, in the opportunity of studying mental mechanisms of artistic creativeness.

One can discern with the aid of these paintings how the original, actual percept of the blot is converted into an imaginary concept. One can also study the fascinating development of the primal concept into further and more elaborate concepts. Most interesting is the observation of a leading idea which links the original, actual percept with the most elaborate concepts.

The detailed description and illustration by examples of these mental mechanisms will be the subject of another study.

#### SUMMARY.

The Rorschach method is based on the stirrings of imagination.

This process is facilitated by the use of paintings of Rorschach responses.

The ability to create imaginative paintings is especially developed in children.

The imaginative material gained by paintings of Rorschach responses is particularly great when a technique is applied which uses the phenomenon of " active imagination."

The meaning of this phenomenon, which was described by Jung, is explained, according to various authors.

By the use of active imagination during the performance of the Rorschach test rich analytical material is often revealed.

This is illustrated by examples.

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