

PSYCHOLOGY

Personality From Ink Blots

Stimulated by Queer-Shaped Figures, One's Imagination Will Reveal Secrets of Character to the Psychologist

By **JANE STAFFORD**

DO YOU SEE pictures in clouds or in the embers of the campfire? You probably do, for this is a universal tendency of mankind.

Psychologists would like to know what you see in the clouds. How people interpret forms or shapes is of particular psychological interest because it tells so much about how the mind works.

Psychologists would like to know, for instance, what a new-born baby sees when he looks at a chair for the first time. Does he see legs and a seat and a back, and maybe arms? Unless he has seen someone sit on it, he cannot know that it is meant for a seat. Does he interpret the shape of the chair as a whole or does he see the legs and other details?

When you look for pictures in clouds, do you consider the clouds as a whole or do you concentrate on the details?

Clouds are so fleeting that they cannot be used for psychological testing. Embers are equally unsatisfactory for this purpose, since no two people can be sure they are seeing the same thing. But one psychologist, Dr. George V. Dearborn of the U. S. Veterans Hospital in the Bronx, New York, decided ink blots would be a good substitute.

At first, ink blot interpretations were considered useful for showing how the normal mind worked. Then a Swiss psychologist, Dr. Hermann Rorschach, thought of using them as an aid to the study of people whose minds were not normal. It appears now that the pictures you see in clouds or ink blots are a revelation of your personality.

How you interpret the form of the clouds or of the ink blot designs depends in part on your experience. The baby, for instance, has no past experience to draw on when he is confronted for the first time with a chair. But when you look at one of the ink blot designs, you will see in it the picture of something you have seen before, or at least have heard described before.

If you are an imaginative person, that will show up in your interpretation of

the ink blots. In fact, Dr. Rorschach claimed that from the ink blot test alone he could diagnose personality. He even proved this by making "blind" diagnoses which were checked against the findings of psychoanalysis. Dr. Rorschach's diagnosis with nothing but the patient's name and response to the ink blots to guide him was the same as that of the psychiatrist who had made the careful psychoanalytical study.

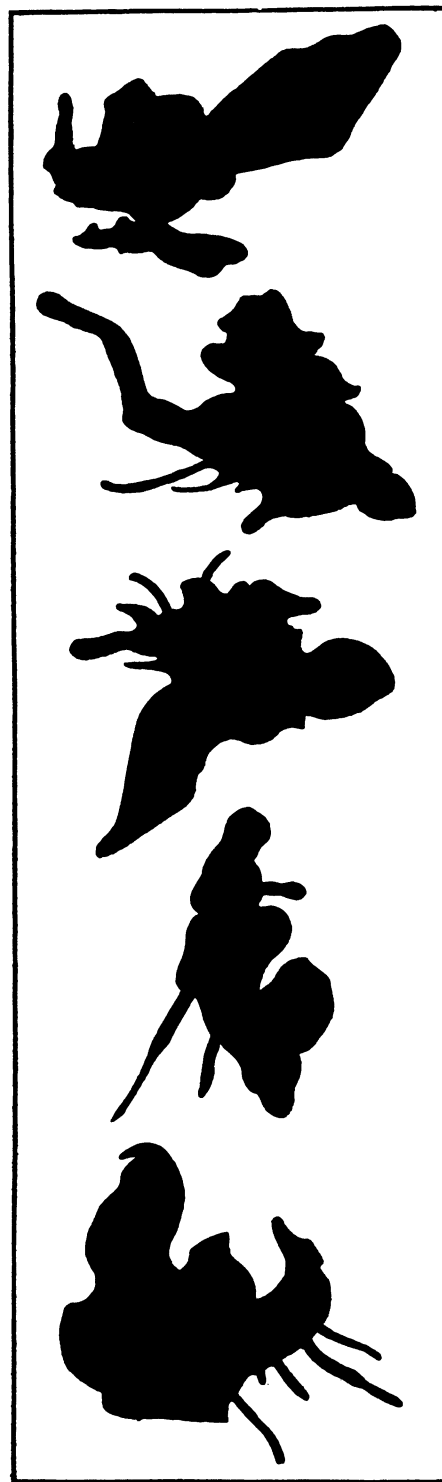
Personality is as important and interesting to the psychologist and the psychiatrist as it is to the movie director. To the psychologist and psychiatrist, however, personality means something more than "It."

One psychologist has said "Personality is ourselves as others see us." It is made up, in part at least, of your environment, your past experience, your training and your consciousness of self.

Hardest Diseases to Treat

The psychiatrist is always trying to find out more about personalities. The hardest diseases to treat are diseases of personality. When the germ of an infectious disease is discovered, with its transmitting agent, it is comparatively simple to bring that disease under control. With diseases of personality, the matter is much more complex. The cause may be in the patient's environment or his past experience or his early training. It may be in the way he thinks of himself or the way he feels about other persons or things. The search for the cause of personality diseases has led to the development of personality tests, among them interpretation of ink blot designs.

In these tests, unlike intelligence tests, there are no right or wrong answers. By giving the same test to many people the psychiatrist learns that certain types will respond in a certain way. You can amuse yourself by writing down what pictures you see in these ink blots taken from Dr. Dearborn's and Dr. Rorschach's sets. Does your picture include the details or merely the general outline? Is the picture you see a stationary object or does it have motion in it?



ORIGINAL INK BLOTS

Dr. Dearborn used them in his first tests. No two persons agreed on what the top one was and most thought the second a man with an upturned coat collar. Time yourself on how fast you see a picture in one of these blots.

Time yourself to see how quickly you see a picture in a given design, and then compare it with the time made by someone else you know. Of course, it would take a trained psychiatrist to interpret your responses, but you may find an inkling of your tastes and habits in them.

Colored Dots Used

The original suggestion for using ink blots as a psychological test was made by Dr. Dearborn when he was a young assistant in the philosophy department at Harvard University. Later the ink blots became more elaborate. Color was added and in the Rorschach test, the designs are no longer in silhouette, but are shaded, with details added inside the original design.

The subjects of Dr. Dearborn's first ink blot study were mostly students in the Harvard psychology laboratory with some professors and their wives and one Latin-school girl.

"In the case of every subject some brief sketch of his or her early life was obtained as regards familiarity with various animal forms, and concerning fairy stories, mythology and the like, and as regards possible habit of watching clouds and other natural forms as a pleasure of the imagination," Dr. Dearborn reported.

"It was expected that subjects raised on a farm, hunters and artists would have a store of advantage over those of contrary habits.

"Among the subjects were two poets and two artists, and all of these were well toward the top in readiness and variety of response. One of these two poets made the shortest average of times and the subject who had the longest average is a young man very little fond of verse."



E. Fonséré, Atlas élémentaire des nuages

AN ANVIL CLOUD TO THE WEATHER MAN

But to a thousand other people it may represent a thousand different objects, revealing a different trait of character about each person.

Dr. Dearborn noticed in some cases periods of inhibition when the subject could not see any resemblance in the blot to any object. This might last for a minute or two. It seemed to be like cases of inability to remember words. In the latter condition the brain paths or currents representing words are blocked, while in the inhibitions during the ink blot tests, the blocking seemed to be among the brain paths or currents representing objects.

There was great variety in interpretation of the blots. On one of the blots no two persons agreed. On another, four-fifths of the subjects saw the familiar figure of a man with upturned coat collar. These were the two extremes.

The same blot that was a "cabbage head" to one person was "an animal with his mouth open" to the next and a "fairy on a cloud" to a third. A professor was reminded by a blot of "half a sweet pea blossom" and his wife of a "snake coiled around a stick."

"It is clear that, as a general principle, the experience, and especially the early experience, of the subject has important influence," said Dr. Dearborn. "For example, study of the records shows that one subject, a purely domestic woman, is reminded most often of domestic objects; while another, who is an artist and student of mythology, sees in the blots many picturesque and fanciful things. The difference between the imaginations of the country and city bred is clear."

Study Memory Processes

Besides studying imagination, Dr. Dearborn used the ink blots to study memory processes. For this a series of 126 blots was made. The blots were shown right side up, upside down, and one-quarter and three-quarters turned. They were also shown as they would ap-



DR. GEORGE V. DEARBORN

He would have used clouds, but he couldn't make them stay still. So he invented ink-blot tests.

pear in a mirror. The subject was asked whether he had ever seen the design before.

"An object upside down appears more natural than when turned on its side or seen in a mirror," Dr. Dearborn reported he found from this test. "One-quarter reversal toward the left is more favorable than three-quarter reversal; while least favorable of the six positions compared in these experiments is the inverted mirror-reversal, most rarely encountered of them all in general experience."

The Rorschach test goes much further than this, and besides depicting your imagination and memory, actually reveals your personality. It is said to be the only test which shows the emotional life of the individual. It gives a sample of what you are likely to do in a given situation. From your response to the Rorschach test, the psychiatrist can predict your behavior.

American psychologists are at present working with the Rorschach test with the idea of determining just what its value is and how it may be used to diagnose diseases of personality.

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