

Linguistic Research Institute
Report No. 38a

PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUES

Peter G. Ossorio
1966

Errata for Projective Techniques

- p. 2, ¶ 3 "Psychological assessment is no different in these respects. In psychological assessment ..."
- p. 2, ¶ 4 "The first one I've got is not as popular now as it used to be..."
- p. 3, last ¶ "Okay, the last class is **projective**, and the standard examples are Rorschach, TAT..."
- p. 4, ¶ 1 "It's the redescription that's one of the hard technical or clinical parts of this."
- p. 4, ¶ 2 "... than in giving WISC's and scoring them..."
- p. 4, ¶ 4 "If I told you, "Go observe this person for 20 minutes, but beforehand, tell me what you're going to find out about," you would not be able to tell me."
- p. 6, ¶ 5 "Those are simple co-occurrence contingencies..."
- p. 7, 1st line "For example, it may take certain kinds of knowledge..."
- p. 7, ¶ 3 "That whole phenomenon shows on Rorschachs and TAT's and Draw a Persons..."
- p. 8, 1st line "Now suppose that I add that ..."
- p. 10, 1st line "you learned to recognize as hostility."
- p. 11, ¶ 2 "The guy is talking like somebody who's sad..."
- p. 11, ¶ 5 "Dropping the details is what gets you away from the non-face-valid description..."
- p. 13, ¶ 5 "To get specific about Rorschachs and TATs and Draw a Persons, etc. ... The TAT is of the first kind."
- p. 14, ¶ 4 "So when you drop the details in a TAT story..."
- p. 15, ¶ 1 "Again, you're in a position to say it looks like he has this kind of thing on his mind..."

Linguistic Research Institute
Report No. 38a

PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUES

Peter G. Ossorio
1966

This report is a transcript of the didactic portion of a workshop on projective techniques held at the eighth annual conference of the Society for Descriptive Psychology in Boulder, Colorado, 1987.

We are very grateful to Mary McDermott Shideler for making the transcript available.

Additional copies of this report can be obtained from the Linguistic Research Institute, P. O. Box 1294, Boulder, Colorado 80306.

PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUES¹

Peter G. Ossorio

Since we want to lay a general background, let me begin with some obvious background things. The first obvious background thing is that assessment was not invented by psychologists. You'll see on your outline--the outline is an outline of topics I want to cover, and one of the important things is, people were doing assessment long before there were psychologists in the world. So in order to understand assessment, it pays to go back to the old natural form, which millions of people still do today, and say, "Well, yeah, there isn't a person alive who, on encountering somebody else, doesn't ask the question, 'What kind of person is this?'" It's a question we all ask about other people.

We don't do this just because it's an interesting question. It does make a difference what kind of person the other person is. That's why we ask and want to know what kind of person is this other person. Now what difference does it make?

Basically, depending on what kind of person you are, you're going to do different things, and the things you do, you're going to do them differently. And somebody who is going to interact with you, or is going to suffer the consequences of what you do or don't do, is going to be interested in anticipating what you will and won't do, and how you'll do it. That's the source of the interest in what kind of person this is, is it gives you ideas about what you can expect from that person; it gives you ideas about how it's appropriate to interact with that person; it gives you ideas about how it's going to be effective or ineffective to interact with that person. And it's also going to give you some idea of what adjustments you have to make in your own view of things, to duplicate that other person's view of things.

So there's lots of things tied up, and lots of very practical and important things tied up, in the question "What kind of person is this?"

Now how do people make assessments? They do it in ordinary observational format, any time, any place. The reason they're able to do it is exactly the reason why it's important, namely, that what kind of person this is makes a difference in what you do and how you do it, and it will make a difference any time, any place. Which means that you can observe a person any time, any place, and start making some judgements about what kind of person this is. And that's what people do.

¹. Presented at the eighth annual Conference of the Society for Descriptive Psychology, Boulder, Colorado, August 17, 1986.

You observe somebody, and you observe what he's doing. Implicitly, you say to yourself, "Well, he could have been doing something else, and he's doing this. What does that say about him?" And you look at what he is doing, and you say, "Well, considering how many different ways you can do that, and this person is doing it this way and not any of these ways, what does that say about this person?"

Notice that to do this, you need to know things. You already need to know what there is to be done, how people can do it; you need to have some idea of what different kinds of people there may be; and how the kind of person it is makes a difference in what the person does or doesn't do. Once you have that, whether correct or incorrect, and no matter how rudimentary, you can make observational assessments. Without that kind of knowledge, you can't. Either you can't, or it's totally pointless. It's pointless because--look, once you know what kind of person this is, you still have to take the further step of What difference is this going to make in what I can expect if I just observe, or what I can expect if I interact with that person, and what I can do that will be more or less effective, and what difficulties I will have if we're going to be doing X, Y, and Z together. If you don't know those things, it doesn't help you to know what kind of person you're dealing with. So the normal forms of assessment, then, require a fair amount of knowledge of these fairly specific sorts.

Psychological assessment is no different in these respects. Psychological assessment, you still have the question, "What kind of person is this?", and you have some purpose in mind. It makes a difference to you which answer you come up with, and that difference is going to be of the form, "If it's this kind, you can expect this. If it's that kind, you can expect that." In that sense, psychological assessment is simply a special case of ordinary assessment, and what primarily marks it is that psychologists have--tend to have--distinctive concepts of what kinds of people there may be, and some distinctive tools, instruments, tests, observational methods.

If we move from assessment in general to the kinds of things that psychologists do, - - - - assessment? You can come up with a fairly simple and crude typology that will help us orient. [blackboard] The first one I've got is ^{not} as popular now as it used to be, but there is such a thing as **self-report**. In self-report, you simply ask the person about himself. You ask him to tell you about himself, and you take whatever comes. As you might guess, that procedure has some hazards. They come under two main headings. One is, the person may not know the things you want to know about himself, and therefore not be able to tell you. And number two, the person may have reasons for not telling you what he knows. After all, why should he? On the other hand, if you don't run into those hazards, what could be simpler and easier than just asking?

The main place where this is used is in interviews. When you do clinical interviews with clients, you ask them, "What was it like in your childhood? Where did you go to school?", and you take it pretty much

straight that the client is telling you how things are. So a lot of the information does come in this sort, but not so many tests of this sort.

The next main class of tests are **correlational tests**, of which the MMPI is a prime example. And the general characteristic is you find something that correlates with what you're interested in, including answers to a set of items that correlate with what you're interested in. That's the kind of thing you get in the MMPI and many other tests of that general sort.

There's some limitations, of course. One is that the correlations usually are not high enough for clinicians to use individually. Second, the kind of correlations you get today with this population, you'll find different correlations tomorrow with some other population. Correlations are only moderately portable through time and through place. Thirdly, correlational methods are not fundamental, in that whatever it is that you're interested in, you have to already have a way of making that assessment in order to set up a correlation. For example, if you're interested in the correlation between the answers to a set of items and whether somebody is schizophrenic or not, you have to already have some way of deciding whether somebody is schizophrenic. It can't depend on that set of items. In that sense, correlational methods are never fundamental, because the fundamental assessment is already here in providing the criterion for your correlation. So you might say that correlational tests are matters of convenience.

The third one is a **job sample**, and you mainly find these with ability tests, or disability tests. What this is characterized by, is that you get a behavioral sample in your test, that taps exactly the ability that you want to find out about. When you go to your optometrist, and he shows you that chart and says, "Read me the third line," he's testing your visual acuity, and the task that he sets you taps your visual acuity. Because it taps the very thing that you want to find out about, it has a certain degree of compellingness and validity. You don't have too much doubts about that test, whether it's really going to tell you about visual acuity, do you?, because it taps into that very ability.

One of the limitations of these is that you can't whip up a test for every achievement that we're interested in. There are just too many things that people do to standardize a separate test for every single one of them. And when you have complex achievements, like--say--being a good salesman or being a good psychologist, what you find is that it takes a lot of other abilities, and if you test those, then you have the problem of how do you put them together. And the fact that a good salesman or a good psychologist, you might get by various different combinations of abilities, and how would you ever tell? So there are limitations and disadvantages of these. The main advantage, as I say, is that you have very little doubt about its validity.

Incidentally, you might ask yourself whether a test like - - - is of this sort or of this sort.

Okay, the last lap is **projective**, and the standard examples are Rorschach, - - - , Draw a Person. One of the distinctive features of

projectives is, you have problems with their face validity. How can you, from seeing somebody say, "This looks like a butterfly," draw conclusions about their personality? How can you, from reading a story about a little boy playing a violin, draw conclusions about conflicts that the story-teller has? Formally, you can say that with projectives, you have an extra step. [blackboard] Think of this pattern as common to all assessment: assessment takes place in some kind of situation; the result of it is some person description; that person description is then carried over to other situations and applied there. What's distinctive about projectives is that you have an intermediate step of redescribing a behavior. It's the redescription that gets you the person description, It's the redescription that's one of the hard textual or clinical parts of this. So later on, we'll go to a little more rationale of how you do that, and why.

Projective tests also have their limitations. They have advantages, but they have limitations, one of which is there's a lot of ways they could be wrong. It's a complicated enough task so you can go wrong in more ways, in more places along the way, than in giving - - - and scoring them and saying, "This kid ought to do well in school."

Another limitation--it's not necessarily a disadvantage, but it certainly is a limitation--is that when you use a projective technique, you never know in advance what you're going to find out about. It's not merely that you don't know what you're going to find out; you don't know what you're going to find out about. In contrast, if I give you a test of visual acuity, I know that I'm going to find out about your visual acuity. If I give you a Rorschach, I don't know what I'm going to find out about. That's because projective techniques are not tests. It's one of the points I want you to have firmly in mind, is that projective techniques are not tests. They don't have the same rationale as tests; they don't have the same use as tests.

Instead, compare giving a Rorschach to simply observing somebody for twenty minutes. If I told you, "Go observe this person for twenty minutes, but beforehand, tell me what you're going to find out about," you would be able to tell me. Afterwards, you can say, "Well, I found about certain conflicts, I found about certain attitudes, I found out certain disabilities this person had," but you couldn't have known ahead of time that that's what you were going to find out, instead of other attitudes or traits or values or other person characteristics.

Thirdly, projective tests are much closer to what I describe as testing before there were psychologists, that is, assessment before psychologists. You make use of the same kind of background knowledge, and you could draw conclusions relative to any situation, any characteristic of the person. So this kind of assessment, then, gives you access to anything whatever about the person that you can discover. It's relatively unlimited as far as what you might discover about the person. And it's relatively unlimited as to the situations--new situations. It's relatively unlimited as to which new situations it's relevant to.

So these techniques are extremely flexible. They have extremely wide use and applicability, and that's why they remain popular in the face of all kinds of research that says they're no good and invalid. People who use them and are good at it, know better.

One of the reasons why--there's a lot of research that tends to show that projectives are invalid, is that the result, the research, almost without exception, treats projective techniques as though they were tests, and asks the kind of questions about them that you would ask about tests. That holds over to the application of this. If you're a clinician, you can use a test-type of rationale, that's what's shown in point 3, where you say, "I've got some data, and I'm going to draw inferences from that data to person characteristics."

Then what you find is that your inferences are always invalid. They're always illegitimate, because you don't have the proper basis for an inference. The test result is never enough to support the conclusions that you want to draw, and that in fact you do draw. But you can't infer them from the test result. So if you're using a test model, you're going to have a guilty conscience, because you always know that you're doing something you shouldn't. Even when it works, you're not going to feel good about it, because you won't be able to explain why.

In contrast, let me offer you a different model, that reflects the fact that it's an observational method and not a test. This model says that you have to know things first. You can't start out with data; you have to start out with prior knowledge, and it's of the kind I mentioned before. You have to start out with prior knowledge about (1) that you're dealing with a person. You don't infer that you're dealing with a person; you take it for granted. Some knowledge about what different kinds of persons there may be, and how those characteristics make a difference in what they do. None of that is inferential. None of that requires data or evidence. You take those things for granted, and only question them if you get stuck.

Mostly, you should be familiar with the notion of a Standard Normal Person, a person who is unremarkable in any way whatever, a person whose behavior is simply responsive to situations in the normal way, and who just does what the situation calls for. So you don't have any person descriptions. You don't say he's brave, and you don't say he's cowardly. You don't say he's intelligent, you don't say he's unintelligent. You don't say he's talented but you don't say he's awkward. You don't say anything about this person. He's just your standard, normal, hypothetical person.

Suppose you start with that in mind. Then you start looking at the test behaviors. If you start with that in mind, every single test behavior, every single description and redescription of those test behaviors, will give you some way of adjusting your picture from--starting from a Standard Normal Person, every piece of information will make a difference. It will cause you to adjust it one way or another. You finally wind up with a person description as a result of these adjustments to the Standard Normal Person, which reflects what you already knew and were taking for granted. And at no

point is there any inference in this entire process. That's how you do it observationally.

Now let's go into a little more technical way of formulating some of these considerations. It starts with a familiar schema [blackboard]. This is the conventional schema for representing a social practice. All behavior can be represented in this form. Anything that anybody does is a participation in one or more social practices. This is a schema that no behavior will fall outside of, so you can apply it anywhere.

How you distinguish one social practice from another is by specifying five parameters. The first is that each practice has some - - - . It is divisible into some number of stages. In social practices, the ultimate stages are individual behaviors. So the first parameter is **stages**. The second is **options**. It's characteristic of human social practices that they can all be done in more than one way. So what you have, then, is options of how you do this thing. You have options at every stage--in general. So the options allow you to represent all of the different ways that this thing can be done.

Then you specify **ingredients**, formal ingredients. It's like specifying the ingredients in a recipe: what does it take by way of ingredients for this process to take place? What people does it take? What sorts of non-people does it take, what sort of materials, what sort of settings, what sort of tools, etc.? What does it take for all of this to go on? [blackboard]

Then we come to the other thing that's going to be of interest to us, namely, **contingencies**. Given that this thing can take place in a number of ways, what does the selection of any given option--what is it contingent on? There are various things that it can be contingent on. For example, suppose that--what does the selection of this option, in Stage 2, depend on? The answer may take several forms. One is, "Well, it depends on what happens elsewhere in the process." For example, if this option was taken in Stage 1, this is one of the open options in Stage 2, but if this had been the option in Stage 1, this would not be an open option in Stage 2. Further, if this is taken in Stage 2, then this one must be taken in Stage 4, so there is - - - Stage 2.

Part of the structure of a social practice is the **co-occurrence** connection. The simplest example of that is a game of chess. You have white first move and black first move, and white second move and black second move, and clearly, the moves that are open to black on second move depend on what he did the first move, and also on what white has done the first two. Those are simple so-occurrence contingencies, and in social practices, for example, you usually don't get answers if you haven't asked the question. Answers follow upon questions; they don't come out of nowhere. Again, co-occurrence contingencies.

Second, **attributational contingencies**. Some of these options require characteristics that not everybody has, so the option is only open either absolutely or probabilistically. to an individual--one of the ingredients--who

has certain characteristics. For example, it make certain kinds of knowledge; it may take certain kinds of ability; it may take certain values; it may take certain preoccupations, whatever, for a person to choose this option in this social practice.

You recall, this is one of the things I said you have to know already. This is one of the answers to "What difference does it make what kind of person is it?"--namely, that there are attributional contingencies, and whatever a person is doing, some of the options are only open to a person of a certain kind.

Now that connection works backward for assessment. If it takes a certain kind of person to take this option, among others, then when you see somebody taking that option, you start drawing conclusions about what kind of person. And that's the primary form of assessment: by watching how people do things, by watching what they do when they could have beendoing something else. You make use of your knowledge of attributional contingencies--you say, "Hey, it looks like this kind of person."

That whole shows on Rorschach and PAPs and Draw a Person, just as much as in ordinary life. It's just that we have some systematic ways of representing specifically some of the relevant considerations, namely, the options, the contingencies, and specifically the attributional contingencies.

Now the connections, and why inference never works. The connection between a person choosing this and being a certain kind of person is not a logical one. You can't infer from the fact that a person does this to that this is a certain kind of person. Part of the reason is that a person has a number of characteristics, not just one, and the effects of one characteristics may be overridden by other characteristics he has. Or he may have unusual circumstances that leads him to behave out of character, or circumstances in which you're not quite sure how these things would show up. So you always have a qualifier when you draw that kind of conclusion. You say, "Well, he's acting like this kind of person unless -- : unless it's a case of exceptional circumstances, unless I'm missing something about his connections, unless he has other characteristics that account for this choice. There's always those qualifiers.

Interestingly enough, people seldom just engage in one practice at a time. Mostly, in just ordinary, walking-around habit, people are doing several things at once. By virtue of that, you get an interesting phenomenon, and it's the Dinner at Eight-Thirty - - -. For those few of you who are not familiar with Dinner at Eight-Thirty, I'll take a couple of minutes and review that. It goes like this: suppose I tell you that yesterday, I left work at six o'clock, got home at six-thirty, and we had dinner at eight-thirty, and it was steak well done. You listen to that and you say, "Ha, so what? - - - ." The reason is that there's not anything particularly revealing about that. It's a story that would hold for lots of people, not just me. It's a commonplace sort of thing. In effect, I'm just telling you that I did the kind of thing that people do, and that's why your answer is "Yeah, so what?"

Now suppose that I that yesterday morning, before I went to work, I had a huge argument with my wife and we never got it settled. Secondly, that whereas I usually do get home at six-thirty, we usually have dinner at seven-thirty, not eight-thirty, and whereas I like steak, I like it rare and I hate it well done. Now about the time I give you that third piece of information, you start smiling, because you have a very different picture now of what was going on last night, and it wasn't as innocent as just having dinner at eight-thirty. "She's really getting back at you, isn't she?"

It's not that it's necessarily true that that's an expression of hostility on her part, but it is obvious, isn't it? Once you have those facts, that's sure what it looks like. - - - - - hear that, right away you draw the conclusion that's sure what it looks like. Now one of the interesting things is, all you need to draw that conclusion, are those facts. You don't have to have seen her. She doesn't need to have looked angry, and she doesn't have to have done anything that looked overtly angry. All she had to do was to serve steak well done at eight-thirty, and that's enough.

If you come back to this diagram, what's going on here--but there are two things going on simultaneously. Number one, we're having dinner, and number two, she's getting back at me. The second one is done not from a distinctive set of performances, but simply by selecting the right options in this very ordinary sort of thing that everybody does, namely, having dinner. By suitably choosing the options in having dinner, she accomplishes something quite different, and it takes nothing other than the choice of the options. It doesn't take anything that looks like anger; it just takes those choices.

In general, when people are doing more than one thing at a time, that limits their options. If you're both doing this and doing something else too, you can't do this one in all of the ways it could be done. That's going to narrow your range of options. And it's fairly likely that you will do this in some non-standard way.

That's a guideline that pays off heavily in interpreting projective tests. It's a well-known guideline. Everybody who uses projective tests says, "Look for unusual responses," and the rationale is the Dinner at Eight-Thirty rationale. An unusual response is a clue that maybe the person is doing something else in addition to just drawing a picture of a child, or in addition to just telling you a story about a boy and a violin, or in addition to just telling you what this spot looks like, that there is something else going on in addition that is limiting the range of options, and therefore generating an unusual response. So you look for unusual or otherwise non-normative responses.

How do you - - - ? You have to know. You have to know what's usual and unusual. This doesn't mean you can give a list; it means you can tell when somebody faces you with something, you can recognize it - - - , just like you recognize when I tell you about that Dinner at Eight-Thirty, you can recognize that that looks like hostility. That's the observational part. With projectives, it's not quite observation. It's recognition. In the

example of Dinner at Eight-Thirty, it wasn't actual observation, was it, - -
- seeing it. All you needed was those facts and you can recognize that it
looks like hostility.

Observation--you recognize these things by observation, mainly--you then
are into all of the problems of observation. And believe me, there are
problems. Historically speaking, I think that one of the reasons clinicians
have long insisted--and not just clinicians, but other psychologists--have
insisted that really when you're interpreting projective tests, you're
inferring, is that it's easy to be wrong, and not everybody can do it, and
not everybody can do it well. And for many decades, if not centuries, it was
a common philosophical assumption that anything that was really observation
was foolproof, that observation, you really basically couldn't be wrong, and
therefore if you were doing something where you could be wrong, where it was
easy to make a mistake, it must be inference or something other than just
observation. I don't think anybody believes that today. It's clear that
observation is not foolproof, but that doesn't make it something other than
observation.

Some of those general problems of observation are escalated when you're
dealing with projective tests. This first handout is called a mystery
picture. Again, most of you are familiar with that, but those of you who
aren't, take a good look at it. This mystery picture will illustrate one of
the major problems of observation, namely, that something can be sitting
there right in front of your nose, and you're looking directly at it, and you
don't see it.

To see what's there, you have to hold it with the print to the left, and
if you want to make it even easier, you just rotate it around and hold it up
to the light, looking through. If you still can't see it, turn it back: it's
a picture of a cow with this being the back of the cow, these two dark spots
being the ears, the two dark spots here the eyes, and this dark spot the
nose. - - - - . Once you see it, you can't help seeing it, and whereas
before you saw it, you might say, "Well, I can see where somebody might see a
cow here, but you could just as easily see it some other way," once you see
the cow, you'd say, "No, that's a picture of a cow." That's one of the
differences between observation and inference. Observation has a
compellingness that merely knowing some facts does not. Once it jells that
way, it's unmistakable and you could be standing fifty feet away and still
see it. You could try not seeing it, and you probably wouldn't succeed.

This isn't your standard picture of a cow, is it? My guess is that they
got it by going through some process of degrading a photograph. If you were
doing an experiment, you would put a grid on it systematically to eat the
white out every tenth square, or something like that, and that would make it
less recognizable.

What corresponds on projective tests--remember, I said there is a
problem with face validity. One way of formulating the problem is that the
behavior that you get on a test is never your paradigmatic behavior. If you
get hostile behavior on a Rorschach, it is never the kind of behavior that

you learn to recognize as hostility. If you get fear, if you get other attitudinal things, it is never the kind of behavior that you've already learned to recognize that way. What you're dealing with are not standard expressions. However, that just makes it harder to see, like this cow. Like this, once you see it, the fact that it's not your standard photograph doesn't really matter, does it? It doesn't carry less conviction, although you can see that in some cases it might. In some cases, you might wind up saying, "Well, yeah, it kinda looks like a cow but you can't really be sure." And when you write a test report and you have something like that, instead of saying, "This person has this attitude," you say, "It may be speculated that this person has this attitude," or you say, "It might well be that this person has this attitude," or something of that sort.

The second problem is easy to generate here [blackboard]. There's an old parlor game called "What is it?", and this is one of the classic examples. You have a group of people [change tape] - - - - but it has to be in such a form that it's hard to tell. If I show you this and say, "What is this?", it will probably take you a while to guess the right answer, and maybe you wouldn't. To make a long story short, what this is, is a picture of a soldier and his dog walking by a fence. If I remove this board, you probably would have no trouble at all recognizing that. What makes it hard is that there's enough hidden, but what makes it legitimate is that there's enough of it showing.

The phenomena that we're talking about with people are like that. Sometimes you only see a part of it, and then you're faced with the task of recognizing that you are seeing a part, and what it's a part of. That's not always easy, and sometimes you miss it. Something - - - extended out over time, you're only going to see portions of them. Think of being at my house when we had dinner at eight-thirty. If you only saw what happened there, and didn't have access to the other facts, you probably would miss something there. So one of the problems with observation, then, is that you don't see enough of the phenomena. That makes it tricky in the way that this is tricky.

For the third type, imagine sitting up in Folsom Stadium here, watching a football game, and you're sitting on the fifty-yard line right at those nice boxes, which is about as well placed as you could be for seeing the action. The ball gets snapped, and all of a sudden there's twenty-two bodies flying around in different directions, and you look at it and say, "Gee, what happened?" Down at ground level, which is much less easy to see what's going on, the coach takes one look and says, "That was an off-tackle slant." There again, you're perfectly placed for watching it. It's happening right in front of your eyes, and you're missing it. And the coach, because he's had experience with that kind of thing, takes one look and he knows what it is. - - - in principle what's happening may take place too fast to catch it because it's by you before you realize that there's something to look at, or it may be too complicated, and by the time you start figuring out some parts of it, it's gone and you can't recapture it. Or it's complicated and you don't see it all accurately, and so you wind up with the wrong idea.

All of these are hazards of observation, and all of them appear in one form or another in projective tests. So it's anything but foolproof. When I said that one feature about projectives is that there's lots of ways to be wrong, and not everybody can do it, and not everybody can do it well, you begin to get a feeling for what's involved. There is all of these inherent difficulties in observation, and there's all that prior learning that you have to have. So there's lots of places and lots of ways where some people can be better at it than others. There's lots of places and lots of ways where you can go wrong.

If you don't go wrong, what you're doing is, you're simply picking up facts. When you read that story about the boy and his violin, and you say, "This has a sad air to it," that's just one fact that you're picking up. And as you read through the other stories or that story, you pick up other facts. And sometimes you hope the same fact is illustrated in various ways, so that you are and more and more sure: "Yeah, that's what's happening. The guy is talking like somebody who's said," or "He's expressing this kind of theme, because he's done it here and he's done it here and he's done it there."

Then you have a bunch of facts, and you need to put them together. At that point, there is no difference between assessment by means of tests and case formulation. You remember, the last two years, we've had a workshop on case formulation and a talk on case formulation, and the year before, some practice at case formulation. When you wind up with a number of facts and have to put them together, that is a case formulation. Case formulation is a case of assessment.

Putting together those facts--actually no: that's misleading. You don't put together the facts. You recognize what pattern those facts already make. You don't do any work on it. You're simply open to seeing how they fit, how they do fit. You don't have to make them fit. That's one of the place where experience helps, where some people are better than others, and where you can get better by working at it.

What there is to get better at, both in establishing the individual facts from tests and in getting the patterns of those facts, there is a pretty strong guideline. It sounds a little mysterious, but the guideline is this: **drop the details**, and see what the pattern is like. Dropping the details is what gets you away from the nonk-face-valid description of what's going on to the relevant description. It gets you from "his story said such and such", which has no face validity, to "he's talking like somebody who's sad", which is at least relevant to the kind of descriptions that you want to wind up giving.

How do you recognize when somebody's saying something that sounds like he's sad? I don't know of any technique for doing it. Experience helps. Practice helps. The more you know about sadness, the more you know about people, the more you know about situations, all of those help, but there isn't some procedure for doing it.

How come dropping the details works? And what details? That's one of those tricky things. It's easy enough to stand up there and say, "Drop the details"; when you're actually working, you find that you drop some details and not others. You say, "What tells you which details to drop?", the answer is "Nothing," but if you're open to some range of possibilities, some patterns will hit you and they involve dropping these details and not those. But it's not that you have some a priori way of picking out which details to drop, and you drop those and then you're okay.

There is a reason why that's the proper technique--that is, drop the details--and it takes us back to a general feature of behavior. [blackboard] I mentioned that mostly people are doing more than one thing at a time. There's two ways in which mostly people are doing more than one thing at a time. One is this: that whatever you're doing, you're doing it by doing something more specific, and you're doing that by doing something even more specific.

Remember the standard example of the guy standing by the farmhouse out in this rolling English countryside. The guy's standing in front of the farmhouse and he's moving his arm up and down. That's your first description of his behavior. Then you add that he's got his hand around a pump handle, so he's pumping the pump. Then you add that there's water in the pump, so he's pumping water, and the pump is connected to the house, so he's pumping water into the house. There are people in the house drinking the water, so he's pumping the water to the people in the house. There is poison in the water, so he's poisoning the people in the house. And the people in the house are conspiring to overthrow the the government, so he's really saving the nation.

That's the story told going that way. You can start up here and say he's saving the nation and he's doing it by poisoning the people in the house, and he's doing that by pumping water to them, and he's doing that by pumping the pump, and he's doing that by moving his arm up and down. All of those are things that he is doing. They are correct descriptions of his behavior. But they are interrelated like this, that he's doing this one by doing this, and he's doing that one by doing that, and so on down the line.

Mostly - - - you start at the top. This is the top-down production of behavior. You don't start moving your arm up and down, and it just happens that your hand is around the pump, and it doesn't just happen, etc. You start, what you're up to is you want to save the country, and because of the circumstances, this gives you a way to do it, namely, by poisoning those people. You want to poison those people, and by virtue of the circumstances, pumping the water to them is a way to do that, so you do it. And pumping the water to them is something you can do by pumping the pump, which is something you can do by moving your arm up and down. That's why you're moving your arm up and down. So the production of behavior goes in this direction, top-down.

And what it is, is you have to be responsive to circumstances. That's why the behavior you're doing generally gets done by doing something else

that is more responsive to circumstances. So you get this kind of pattern in general.

You can say that the more concrete ones wouldn't be there except that they are ways of doing this. And this one wouldn't be there except that it's a way of doing this, and so on down the line. So when it comes to what he's really doing, you have to work your way up here, because the other ones are only there in so far as they are ways of doing this--the thing at the top.

Down here at the very bottom is the protocol, the actual story, the ^{specific} story, the actual picture that he drew, the record of what he said this Rorschach blot looks like. That's down here. To get to what he's really up to, you have to move in this direction, and that's what you get by dropping the details. Dropping the details means drop this description, drop the more concrete description, and see what's left, and what's left, you're going to have these more meaningful descriptions.

That's why, in the paradigm here, you've got this extra step of redescribing. You've got to get away from the protocol language of what he said, what he did on the test, up to some other description of what the person did, from which you can then connect to a person description. By the way, that rationale holds for interpreting dreams, also. That's why you interpret dreams by dropping the details and seeing what pattern - - -.

By the way, one of the other rules of thumbs is **Don't Make Anything Up**. Don't go beyond what you have. You can see why: by adding something, by adding that there is a pump there, you change the story completely about what he's doing. By adding that there's poison in the well, you change completely the story of what he's doing. So if you allow yourself, in these interpretations--either dreams or projectives--if you allow yourself to bring in something that isn't there, you can make it into anything by suitably adding context. And lots of clinicians do. It's very easy, unless you're used to and are watching out for not making things up. It's easy to do.

To get specific about Rorschachs and PATs and Draw a Persons, etc., think of this kind of typology. In general, projective tests or projective tasks are either going to be production tasks--for example, you tell a story or you draw a picture, something that you do. Or they're going to be selection tasks--what does this look like? Which picture does this picture resemble most? Those are simply selecting from possibilities. The Rorschach is of the second kind--what does this think look like? The PAT is of the first kind--tell a story.

Just for convenience (at least I think it's just for convenience), introduce a principle that says **People think about what concerns them**. And they not only think about what concerns them; they talk about what concerns them, and they daydream about what concerns them, and they dream about what concerns them. In effect, whatever a person has a stake in is going to be on his mind. He's going to have a tendency to talk about it, to work at it, to think about it, to be concerned with it in all of the ways that we're familiar with.

When you get a production task like telling a story--"Tell me a story related to this picture"--the person can't just comply with the instruction pure and simple. He can't just tell you a story; it's got to be a particular story. So there has to be something else in the picture other than the instruction in order that he comes out with an actual story. What does he have to draw on, to tell a story? Well, all of the things that I said you needed to know ahead of time reappear here in what the subject knows ahead of time, what he's going to do with it, what connections he sees, and what he's concerned about.

If your task is to tell a story, and it's going to be a story about this boy with this violin here, still you've got to pick something more specific. And what could be easier than to pick the more specific in terms of what you already have in mind. So if you're thinking sad, you pick the possibilities in the story that express sadness. Or if you're angry, you pick some of the possibilities that express anger--just like Dinner at Eight-Thirty. All it takes is that you tell the story one way rather than some other, just like in the other case, all it took was that you have dinner in this way instead of some other way.

Notice that the person doesn't have to know what's going on. The person doesn't have to realize that - - - - - [cough in background] on his mind because he's thinking - - - - , and that it's showing up here. From the person's point of view, he's simply telling a story because you said "Tell me a story", and he's telling you a particular story because that's the only way you can tell a story, is to tell a particular story. So the selectivity that goes on is not something that the person is necessarily aware of, or could tell you if you asked. On the other hand, remember, neither is it foolproof. You may say, "This looks sad," and somebody else says, "No, it doesn't look sad, but it looks like X and Y kind of concern." And you may ask, "Are those mutually exclusive, or could it be both?"

So when you drop the details in a ^TPAT story, what you're doing is getting rid of what you might call the "task", namely, "Tell a story". You're getting back to the level of description that may connect you to what he has in mind. Since that's what you're looking for, you're going to fit descriptions that are at least candidates for things that the person has in mind.

In contrast, with a Rorschach where it's simply a matter of selection, you can't work this rationale, because the person isn't doing something that has options the way this does. Instead, you have to explain why does something look this way to him, and not that way. The answer brings you back to Square 1, namely, in making observations, why does something look this way to you and not that way? And the answer is the same in both cases, namely, by virtue of what you have, by virtue of your experience, of what you're familiar with, of what you've dealt with, of what you've learned to recognize--in effect, your conceptual repertoire. That's what you have available for recognizing what this ink blot looks like.

Out of all of that repertoire, if you get the same ideas happening, you're in a position to say, "Of all of the things that he could have had in mind, it looks like he has this in mind." Or if you see patterns that are distinctive enough so that you're willing to say, "This kind of arrangement doesn't happen by accident," I don't need to see it repeated in order to believe it's there. Again, you're in a position to say it looks like has this kind of thing on his mind, and not that. And maybe not because he's concerned about it, but because just that's what's familiar to him, that's what he takes for granted about the world. Those are the terms in which he sees the world.

In some sense, you can see that that's chancy, and why you're never sure ahead of time what you're going to find out. But it is very definitely a rationale for how you approach Rorschach. Again, it has nothing to do with inference. It deals with the nature of observation and what it takes, both on your part and on the subject's part--what does it take for him to, by observation, say, "That looks like a butterfly."

Okay, I think that covers pretty much what I wanted to cover by way of preparation for taking some case material or some testing material, and getting some practice at looking at it with this kind of rationale in mind, and getting some practice at dropping the details and seeing what happens. So according to the way we've set this up, we'll take a short break now and then reconvene and look at the test material.